Dreams Are Like Angels

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Dreams Are Like Angels

by AtticusCrete

Summary

The aftermath of Hannibal's arrest at the end of season one. Moving into Kaiseki and the Silence of the Lambs. Then follows season 2 canon off and on. Probably more off than on.

This is the Dr Plushy Pants AU. Season 2. Sort of follows canon timeline, but with substantial changes. Some of the same cases as canon and Big differences. Some of the same canonical characters, also big differences. Some of the same canonical relationships, also differences. Each episode tagged. Building up to Kaiseki events in chapter 2 onwards.

For a full explanation of the AU see ch 2 of 'Solace, not even a quantum' or read shorter notes below, otherwise just throw yourself in and good luck!

Notes

Key things to remember:-

What you need to know - Hannigram established relationship. Beverly Lives. Mischa never died. Will's dad Beau is around. Frederick Chilton/Jimmy Price. Will is recovering from Encephalitis. Abigail is a shit. Matthew Brown is her cousin. There's an odd magic-realism thing in the background. Brian Zeller is pretty nice in this AU.

Freddie Lounds is a bit infatuated with both the Lecters. Chiyoh is sort of Mischa's companion/friend, Hannibal is a cutie/rumbling thunder god/sex on legs depending on who you ask, but is Hannibal the Ripper? If he is does Will know? Will is just great and a bit more confident in this AU.

Rust Cohle from True Detective is an old friend of Will's from New Orleans, Miriam Lass ran away, and came back. Clarice Starling is a field agent in Nebraska. Jack is Jack. Paul Krendler occasionally subs for Jack. Bedelia is still Hannibal's therapist, but a bit sharper. Franklyn survived, Abel Gideon is a hiccup of hysteria, Alana had a big thing for Will and is now with Margot. (Phew) Follows timeline of season 2, extra deaths and events, some things are the same. Some not (well duh, with this line up). Started with 'A terrible name for a Museum' and 240,000+ words later here we are (throws hands up in despair).

Originally this was going to be in episodes as a series but I changed my mind! So it'll be a multi-chapter AU for the whole of season 2.

Chapter 1

'Dad? Hey. Dad. Hey. What happened? Bev. Sweet. I'm so tired'

'Will, lad' Beau is somewhat choked 'I'm so glad you're awake. We're here for you'

'I'm ok. I'm ok. I'm back in hospital aren't I? Did I dream the whole thing with Gideon? What happened?'

'You saved the Freddies, Hannibal actually saved Chilton. You saved Alana too. From Gideon'

'Yeah? Ok. That's good. I feel weird. Have I been out? How long have I been out?'

'A few days. You had a seizure. They had to put you in a coma'

'Yeah? Ok. I thought the stag was a bit too weird, even for me'

'The Doc says you'll probably fall asleep soon. Like after Stammetts? Do you remember?'

Bev is trying not to cry. It was after Stammetts and seeing Will and Hannibal interact in the hospital that she was convinced they would be a thing.

Will smiles. So tired. 'Yeah. I do. It was funny. I was punny. Where's Hannibal?'

Bev smiles at him, she and Beau had discussed this 'he's just stepped out. He'll be back in a bit. He'll be so cross he missed you waking up'

'He's an idiot'

'Sure. Your idiot though'

'Too right. No snaffling Bev. Or snogging. Mine to....' and he drifts off.

Bev grips Beau's arm 'oh god. How will we tell him?'

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'Hello Will. I'm allowed to visit you now. I hope you feel a bit better'

Will slightly struggles to focus, Hannibal? 'Mischa. Hey. I'm so pleased to see you. Wow. You brought mochi. Thank you'

'Beverly says you might suddenly fall asleep. That's alright. I don't mind. I just wanted to see you. My Aunt and Uncle are coming at the weekend. From Japan. It's very exciting. They want to meet you too. I haven't seen them since I was quite small. I hope you get better soon'

Will smiles at her. Wow. Robertus and Murasaki. This is going to be interesting. What prompted that? He realises Freddie is in the room too

'Freddie. Hey. You as well. This is nice. Do you want a mochi? Did you bring fruit again? Oh god you did! That's so nice. I'm a bit ..'

'It's alright Will. I mainly came with Mischa, make sure she didn't kidnap you. It's becoming a habit of yours. Oh, and thanks for saving my life'

'Of course. Any time. How's the other Freddy?'

'He's doing ok. It'll be a bit of time in recovery. He lost a kidney, a spleen. What does a spleen even do?'

Will listens to her give an explanation of the various organs that Gideon extracted from Frederick Chilton during the impromptu surgery at the observatory. Hannibal saved him. That's good. Why hasn't he seen Hannibal? He can't quite keep a hold of that thought and he's gone again. Asleep.

'Freddie? I think he's asleep again. Shall we go? Can I bring a banana with me?'

'Yeah sure. Let's share one'

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Hannibal is sitting resting on his bed with his legs drawn up and his back against a wall. His eyes are closed. This afternoon he is finally going to be allowed some books and writing materials. At last. These few days have been distinctly unpleasant. Though he has bribed an orderly to bring him some different soap. Strange the currencies of prison. All he'd had to do was dictate a letter for the man to resolve some sort of complaint. The man had thought he'd be good with words and he is.

By now Will must have been awake for more than twelve hours. He must be wondering where Hannibal is. Hannibal has to relax his jaw. He's been gritting his teeth. Beau won't be allowed in to see him for another few days. Charles says Murusaki and Robertus will come on Monday. He might not see Will for weeks. If he's even allowed to visit. Hannibal sighs.

'Alright then Doc? How's it going for you today then. Must be a bit of a come down, sinking in is it. How's your boyfriend?'

Hannibal doesn't open his eyes. He knows who this is 'Mr Brown. I congratulate you'

'Right. What for exactly?'

'For living up to and beyond all your promise. Quite outstanding'

'Ok. Abs said you were funny with words. What's that all about?'

Hannibal opens his eyes and looks at Matthew Brown 'your ability to hit the nail on the head every time? Your timing? Your ability to plan? Need I go on? I am simply admiring your

capacity to overcome every obstacle put in your way'

'That's not all me. Mostly that's Abs. I'm just along for the ride. Now I've got to bring you dinner. You've got a choice of meatloaf with mash and beans or a combination of any of those. What would you like?'

'I don't think the word is like. All three please'

'Okey dokey. You're pretty polite aren't you? I mean in the circumstances? I thought you'd be angrier. Abs says you might be the Ripper. She's still not sure. She did think it was Gideon. He'll be back tomorrow by the way. Your boyfriend didn't really hurt him. Heard he was bad though. Poor Dr Graham. Does he know about you?'

Hannibal sighs again 'what about me?'

'If you're the Ripper. Or if you're inside. Either. Both. Anything to say?'

'Not presently. I shall consider your queries Mr Brown, be assured of that'

'Alright then. Slide the tray back when you're done. Oh and Dr Chilton is doing well. You saved his life. Well done. See ya'

Matthew departs and another orderly Barney returns 'don't let him rile you Dr Lecter. Freddie Lounds told me Dr Graham came round ok. He's doing well. I'll try and keep Brown away from you.'

'Thank you Barney. You are the epitome of considerate'

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'I'm glad Fredrick's going to be ok. Do you want sugar with that?' Brian and Jimmy are in the hospital canteen, drinking hospital coffee. Hmmm.

'Thanks Bri. Just the one. I am too. I feel so bad about Will though. Bev told me what Jack said'

'Yeah. He was a manipulative shit. Probably Hannibal feels a bit worse about it'

'Yeah. I feel bad about that too. Have you decided whether to see him or work the case'

'I thought we should talk about that. I think you should see Hannibal and I'll work the case. You'll want to see Frederick and he'll be back at the BSCHI before we know it. So it makes sense'

'Bri, we shouldn't really talk about an open case if one of us is off it'

'I've thought of that Jims. We won't talk about the case, we'll not talk about it'

'Am I being especially dense about this?'

'No. funny guy. It'll be like jeopardy, sort of. I'll give you an answer and you have to tell me what the question would be. Try it err, ehhm, ok Hannibal made a fly at Christmas for their Christmas tree'

'Alright Bri, and the question would be what bit of evidence in the case is wrong but no one has checked it yet?'

'Bingo. Let's try another. Ok Jims Hannibal bought his coat just before Thanksgiving to wear on the road to impress Will'

'Did Hannibal get blood on his coat when he killed Elise Nicholls in September?'

'Yeah. Brilliant. And you see because we know each other so well we almost read each other's minds I think we can do this? And I won't ever ask you about the case. And you don't need to ask me. We can just make statements and the other one has to work out what question needs to be answered'

'Alright Bri let me try. Hmm. I think you're better at this. There are at least thirty Ripper kills'

'Shit. Alright. Was Hannibal ever connected in any way to any of them?'

'Ok. So it might work. Let's ask Bev when we see her. Miriam Lass met with Hannibal and Frederick' Jimmy scrunches up his nose. Of course he doesn't want Hanni-baby (wait. What ? Jimmy?) to be guilty, but nor does he want it to be Frederick!

'Ok. How many people did Miriam Lass meet with..... that she remembers.....so far?' Brian raises his eyebrows as he extends the sentence to include different aspects of the question

'Excellent. High five' Jimmy and Brian hug each other and laugh.

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Rust and Freddie Lounds are sitting outside Will's hospital room. Beau is inside with Mischa and Chiyoh. They're in the process of telling Will about Hannibal. Freddie is here to whisk Misch away if necessary, Rust is here to help with Will if needed. Of all of them he knew Will when Will's shit went down back in New Orleans, and Will helped him out during the hiatus of his own case from hell.

'You're doing a good job'

Freddie raises her eyebrows 'you think? My hits have doubled. It's all revenue you know'

'You're not as heartless as you'd like to be. I can see the edges of your heart. All burnt and charcoal. But the core? Molten. You write with it. Leave streaks of your own kind of love on the page'

Freddie looks at him, where does Will Graham find these people? Weird, fierce, and so loyal. It's why he and Hannibal work. Maybe. Both inspiring fierce loyalty. Freddie thinks about the ever expanding group. What they'd do for each other. Will actually saved her. Really.

Hannibal definitely saved Chilton. And he doesn't even like him that much. But he's With Jimmy. So they get stuck in.

'You think? No one else does'

'About you or what you write?'

She just looks at him 'I like Mischa. I want to help. I don't know why. It's like gravity. I'm being pulled in to orbit around it'

Rust laughs 'Will's always been like that. He doesn't see it, because there aren't that many people involved but he's like honey. When he's good. He is an amazing friend. Saved me too'

'From what, or who?'

'From myself. From obsession. From my own cussedness'

Freddie shifts 'I wasn't going to ask. But. We're you ever together?'

'Nah. He wanted it at one point. I said no. Not because I didn't like the idea. Maybe too much. I'd have been bad for him. Toxic. I'm not good in relationships. But he let me stay with him. Months. Let me lie around, drink too much, made me take the dogs out. He only had three then. Helped me get it together again. Didn't do much, just created a space where I could. So really? He did everything'

Rust crushes the plastic cup he's been drinking from 'I looked back through the press. Apart from arts stuff, charity stuff, society pages, Hannibal's only been in the print media once. He was a witness in some stabbing. Stepped in, helps the guy who was stabbed. Who was actually the mugger. Nothing else. Only two speeding tickets. Three parking violations. He's in council records once, application to convert the attic. Must have been when Mischa came to the US'

'Yeah. I looked through everything too. Got a sub who does this kind of thing. Says Hannibal's cleaner than clean. Will's got more traffic violations than Hannibal even. I've pulled all the Ripper stuff. There's a couple of PhD candidates at Georgetown working on the Ripper, one sort of at a tangent, looking at serial killer display iconography' Freddie smiles when Rust snorts 'academia. God' 'I know. The other one is doing some sort of comparative analysis between unsolved serials, sprees and triples'

'Freddie, don't you ever think to yourself how did it come to this?'

'All the time. It pays my bills though. Chiyoh hey. Ok?'

Chiyoh comes out of the room and closes it quietly behind her. Rust and Freddie both stand up.

'Will is upset. It is best that it is just Beau and Mischa. She is alright. Being brave for Will is helping'

'You alright?'

'Yes. It was useful that both Beau-San and I have seen Hannibal-San. He found it re-assuring. He understands he will not be allowed to see him yet. He doesn't like it. I am to get paper and pen'

'For Will? To write to Hannibal? Tell him to put it through the mail, the Feds can't open it. They can if you hand deliver it'

'Thank you Freddie, this is what Beau-San said. Hannibal-San had reminded him.'

'What happens now?'

'I shall wait here, you should get some food Mr Rust. When you return I will take Mischa home. Freddie Lounds thank you. You cheered Hannibal-San up very much. They will let you know when you can go in to see Will'

'Thanks Chiyoh. Ok. I'll get some food. You want anything either of you?'

'Coffee please' 'tea please' Rust smiles, these two, so different and so similar.

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'Mr Graham? Hello. Is it alright if I sit. I know you've had a busy day I won't tarry.'

Will pulls himself up a little in bed, even that is tiring 'hi, yeah, sure, please grab one'

'We haven't met. I've heard a lot about you. All good I should add. I'm taking over from Jack Crawford on the investigation. The two girls. And keeping oversight on the Ripper. Just to minimise some of the crap. You'll find me plain speaking. I think we'll get along just fine. I know it must be hard. I want to say to you it'll all come good. But I know you know these things take time. But I'll be a straight arrow on this'

'Alright. That sounds alright. Thanks. You look slightly familiar? But you know I'm a bit woozy at present?'

'Well sure' Will likes her voice, she's got some of the cadence of home. His dad. Some of his wilder cousins. The mountain men. She smiles at him 'you were kind to my friend Miriam. I heard all about that too. Thank you for that. I'm properly grateful for that. You and the doctor? I'll treat you both fair. Respectful.'

'Have you seen Hannibal yet?'

'No. I was going to leave it for a bit. I wanted to see you first. Give a bit of time for things to settle. I know they aren't for you. Ok. I know that. Surely'

Will smiles 'the doctor says I'm doing better than she thought I would, in the circumstances'

'Well that's just fine. I've got a proposition to put to you. There's a chance, and I've spoken to your doctor about this, in about a week, I can get you into the BSCHI. Only for ten minutes or so. And you mustn't tell anyone. I'm going to get it cleared at my end. Officially we'd be trying to prompt the doctor into some kind of confession, but I'm more interested in his

impressions of Abigail Hobbs when he saw her. I think he'll tell me, if you're there too. Otherwise I'm just another FED'

'You want to use me to help you get proper access to Hannibal'

'Yes. I'm not going to mess about Dr Graham. I'm clear that's what I'm doing. And I want to front up to you too. He'd have to see me anyway, but if I can establish some trust this might go faster and easier'

'Alright, some honesty is nice for a change'

'I'll try and make sure that's all you get from me. Ok. That's all from me. Anything else?'

'You still didn't say'

'Sorry. I'm Clarice Starling' she smiles at him 'Field Office in Nebraska. Back for the count'

Will smiles back at her and closes his eyes. Agent Starling. Of course. Fucking hell.

Chapter 2

From his hospital bed Will can't quite see out of the windows, only the sky, a mottled February-ness. If he stretches up, rather uncomfortably he can just see the tops of some trees on the far side of the hospital grounds. So he closes his eyes.

Hannibal has an amazing mind palace but he, well he has the quiet of a stream. All he has to do is close his eyes and he can take himself quietly there. Waders on, up to his knees in water as he casts once and then again. It's all about setting the lure right. Just so. He casts again.

On the far side of the water on the bank he can see the stag, still beautiful, though an antler is broken and some of its feathers are torn. It regards him calmly now. All hint of flame and fire is gone. Hannibal he whispers, Hannibal.

The stag snorts, as though surprised and turns and walks regally away. Will just watches. Grateful to have seen it at all. He opens his eyes and Chiyoh is standing beside his bed.

'Will Graham, Hannibal-San's aunt and uncle will arrive today. Mischa and I will meet them at the airport Mr Rust is driving us. They have expressed a wish to see you as soon as they have taken their bags to a hotel. Is this acceptable to you?'

Will smiles, its hard to tell sometimes if Chiyoh's manner is more to do with English being her third language or if it's sort of her demeanour in general.

'I'd be glad to see them. Do they understand I've been ill? That there are some things I am hazy on? And that I get tired really quickly. I don't want them to think I'm rude'

'They know of your illness. They will make appropriate allowances. Tomorrow they will see Hannibal-San, and the lawyers. The day after, the new Agent in charge.'

'She came by yesterday. She's ok. I've got reasonable confidence in her. Not total. Frankly I feel completely shafted by the FBI overall'

Chiyoh raises an eyebrow, this is an unusual level of frankness between them. It's not that she doesn't like Will, or vice versa, there's just usually other people around who have a prior claim on his time and attention, or her's.

'You do not have to defend them in any way to me. I can see what they do'

'I expect you can. Anything especially? It'd be good to get a non law enforcement view, and dad's too biased'

'They use you in whatever way is convenient. Either as a tool or a scapegoat. I am glad you resigned when you did. I wish it had been sooner'

'Wow. That is the most succinct anyone's been. That's, I was going to say good. But, well, obviously it's not. Yeah. Tool and scapegoat'

he shakes his head sadly. He'd got the whole bit about being used. Scapegoat is interesting. Hannibal certainly is right now. 'Have you seen Hannibal? Does he understand why I haven't come?'

'He knows. He is trying not to be angry that he is not permitted to come here. If you were married it would have been allowed almost certainly. His lawyer is trying for some kind of negotiation about this. The federal court appointed lawyer is sticking his heels in. Says you might have information that would taint Hannibal's testimony' she sees the face he is making 'it is not sensible, I know. It is how it is'

'Yeah, that's the truth. How is he?'

'It is difficult to say. He can be very collected and hard to read. He is somewhat withdrawn. I would say he is being very careful. Freddie Lounds has made him laugh. She has talked her way in past three different warders now. It is amusing. She says it is her goal to get past every single one! There is a nice orderly. He will take in contraband, small things, not mail or a cell phone. I asked him. But soap, toothpaste. Small things. But they make a difference'

'That's good. That's great in fact. How is Hannibal managing with Matthew Brown?'

'More difficult. Though Hannibal-San says he can see a way to make Matthew useful in the wider situation'

'Oh? Will he tell you about that?'

'I am not sure. He knows that he made a mistake last time. He is probably keen not to repeat that. But I will encourage him to speak of it'

'And how are you Chiyoh?'

She looks at him in surprise. Surely he has more claim to be asked?

'I am... tired and I think sad. Though I can see if the Lady Murasaki and Robertus-San can be reconciled to both Mischa and Hannibal-San some good will have come of this. But yes. I am tired. There are many emotions flying. I find them hard to make my way around sometimes. You Americans wear all your hearts on your sleeve'

Will smiles broadly 'oh we do. What's your take on everything overall?'

'The FBI have made a big mistake. It will not stand up in court. I hope it will be thrown away at the preliminary hearing'

'Has that been set yet?'

'Two weeks. Will you be permitted to attend?'

'I really hope so' Will bites his tongue, he mustn't tell her about Agent Starling's offer.

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'Alright Mr Lecter. Hello again. Now this is nice. I've got a nice lady to see you. You can see her here or in the visitor room. If you say the room you'll lose about ten minutes of chat cos we've got to get you there and back see, within the forty minutes?'

'Mr Brown, as concise as ever. Here will be fine' Matthew brings over a chair and plonks it on the floor a few feet back from the cell, behind the faint line on the floor. Somehow Hannibal is expecting the new agent in charge but it's not. It's his own psychiatrist.

'Bedelia, this is an unexpected pleasure. How are you?'

'I might ask the same of you?'

'I have now been allowed writing materials and I have a choice of books from the hospital' library. It is fascinating what people choose to read, the notations in the margins are quite extraordinary. I think there is a paper in there somewhere. Or at least a commentary. I say this mainly to indicate that I am not unoccupied.'

'I understand Will Graham is not permitted to see you yet'

'It's true. I hear of Will through intermediaries. And with that I must currently be content.'

'I have heard the case against you is flimsy'

'I believe so, yes. Nevertheless it is wise to be prepared'

'And what are you preparing for'

'For whatever comes'

'That seems remarkably unlike you. To not anticipate events'

'Perhaps so. But a prison is like another country and I am still learning both the language and the customs'

Bedelia gets up from her chair and walks around it. She is frowning to herself.

'I find it very difficult to believe that....., although I know I see only a small fraction of you in our sessions..... that you might in any way be involved in these crimes. So saying,'

she moves closer to the bars of his cell. In the distance an orderly, someone shouts

'stay behind the line ma'am'
she takes another step closer, and again

'ma'am, stay behind the line'

once she is standing right beside the bars she whispers

'I believe you'

Two orderlies come and gently, politely pull at her elbows, one on each side, and she is led away.

Hannibal looks after her. He hadn't expected anyone who knew him not to believe him. Though Bedelia does have a tendency towards the dramatic.

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Brian holds a door open and ushers through the other science team members, 'Wow. That was a bit weird!'

Jimmy smiles at him, almost laughing, 'Wasn't it? He looks very like Hannibal, older, obviously. And she's extraordinary!'

Brian grins back, Lady Murasaki is something else again, 'Isn't she? Bev, what do you think Will made of it?'

'Honestly Jimmy? I don't know. Your same sex lover's elderly family turn up to see you when you're recovering from encephalitis and your said lover is in prison, well not even prison, a secure hospital, soon to be charged with at least two counts of murder. And the uncle and aunt haven't seen their niece or nephew for almost thirty years because said niece killed her father when she was a child, and she was in prison for twenty five years. I mean, that's going to be weird. Kind of goes without saying.'

'Yeah. Shit. Why aren't we in a bar?'

'We should be. Come on'

Jimmy, Brian and Beverly head out of the hospital together. Lady Murasaki and Robertus had been quite gracious about everything and Chiyoh had managed the introductions and courtesies well. Will even had something to give them as a welcoming gift.

None the less it had been odd, both Mischa and Chiyoh switching between Japanese, Lithuanian and English, and Will mostly smiling and trying to look as though this was all pretty normal for him. He'd surprised Team Sassy Science by speaking slightly more Japanese and Lithuanian than they knew he had.

'I have this feeling that with these two on board it's going to be a whole lot, I dunno, lickety spit?'

'They do bring the whole, I dunno, naughty children thing with them'

'That's not just their age is it? It's more, I don't know, they look at you as though that little problem they're having, well you should have sorted that ages ago!'

'They do don't they? I thought it was just me feeling guilty about something'

'I thought Will was actually looking quite a bit better. Didn't you?'

'Yeah. I think he is, Beau says he's going for the whole of course it's going to be fine approach. He's got in bed with Clarice pretty quick. Not like that, idiots'

Brian and Jimmy smile at her. Didn't seem likely but really, everyone's been way too miserable for several weeks and surely there must be a silver lining somewhere.

'Chiyoh told Will that if this reconciles the Lecter clan it will be good'

'It'll be something. Got to be weird for Beau too, right?

'Yup, he and Rust are staying at the house as well. That's gotta be one hell of a house party. I did offer, but he said he was trying to keep an eye on them as he'd promised Hannibal he would'

'Alright then. See you in the bar in about' Brian looks at his watch 'fifteen minutes ago'

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It is an emotional encounter, and it's also hard to embrace your aunt and uncle when your hands are shackled on a long chain attached to a bolted down table. The orderlies though had been courtesy itself, Hannibal has heard one say 'I think they're some kind of European Royalty' he'd smiled. Royalty? No. Nobility? Yes.

Someone had even brought decent chairs and tea in proper china. Clearly they had both conveyed an extraordinary degree of entitlement which no one at the BSCHI had thought to challenge.

'We have met the Deputy Director Hannibal. I understand you saved his superior's life. Well done'

Hannibal smiles, they might not have been keen on him being a doctor but he had excelled as a surgeon. He appreciates Robertus's willingness to find something positive to say.

'We have seen Mischa. It is very nice to see her again. She has grown into a fine woman. Although I regret the circumstances of course, it is a pleasure to be re-united. We have made enquiries about whether she might be able to visit us at home. Not now. But in the future. The legal situation is tricky. I am sure you know this'

'Yes, aunt. Chiyoh has kept me apprised of events. I understand you saw Will too and his father?'

'Beau Graham is a charming man' Hannibal smiles at his aunt's words. Beau's magic at work there too 'his son is delightful. I can see that he is not, of course, at his best. But a pleasure. And clearly missing you very badly. He cried to see Robertus. I had not realised until now how alike you might appear'

Robertus looks at Hannibal and smiles slightly, and yes, Hannibal can see that this is how he might look in his seventies or eighties. Dear Will, his Will.

'I am grateful that you are here, for the solidarity it presents. It will help Mischa too. Thank you'

'Of course. I wish to ask you about the newspaper woman. Ms Lounds. Do you trust her? She has asked to interview us'

'She is very loyal to Mischa, and so far she has held out against the common line in the press here. I would say on balance, yes. But I'd also say she is a consummate professional journalist. If you don't want to see it in print, do not say it or infer it'

'She said you have granted her interviews'

'A recipe for dip! Yes. And she has managed to talk her way in here several times. She has been very amusing in her disguises. I am willing to pay for these small pleasures'

Robertus smiles at him then 'you pay in words and smiles'

'I do. It is currently the best currency I have here. Did Charles tell you Will has some control over my finances? He insisted on everything being countersigned by Charles. As Beau is Will's other proxy if Will is indisposed Beau can make decisions. I understand he has said he will consult with you?'

Robertus nods

'good. If Rust Cohle needs any financial support, or the two men with whom he is working, please ensure Beau feels confident to do that. He has my permission. Will I think will almost certainly refuse any personal help, please try and ensure if he or Beau need it that they have it. As unobtrusively as possible?'

'Of course Hannibal. We understand. They are family, and we help our family'

'Thank you. I appreciate the sentiment very much. Now, will you tell me how you are, you can see how I am, let us speak of other things. I expect you will be allowed the full hour but let us make the most of it'

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'Hey Bev. How's it going?'

'Alright gorgeous. You don't look as sick as before. You're not green. Good. Green doesn't really suit you'

'I wear lots of green'

'I know'

'I really hate you. My brain's on fire, I'm stuck in a hospital, my wrongly accused boyfriend is in prison (yeah, yeah, near enough), his, frankly, terrifying family have turned up. Dad's had to take unpaid leave, and you're telling me my clothes don't suit me?'

'Yeah? So bite me'

'Funny lady. Alright. What's what then?'

'Glad you asked. Clarice Starling is a force of fucking nature. She's down on everything I tell you. The coat evidence? She told Paul Krendler to go fuck himself. I heard. There was a shouting match! She's been given one of the empty offices next to the lab? From the hiring freeze, and Gilbert retired? It's got great acoustics. Probably why no one really likes it, no chance of a whispered conversation'

'Tell me more, I love that she shouted at Krendler'

'Yeah, well she's got a bit of a soft spot for Jack but they've had a slanging match too. But Krendler used to have a thing for her. Pursued her a bit, was going to divorce his wife and everything. Until she told him where to go. Anyway she showed him the shop accounts ledger and it immediately cast doubt on the coat. And it's gone. And probed Abigail's testimony is unreliable. The stuff with the flys? She's got three new experts looking at them. The knife? Same. The other bits and pieces? Same. She's got three agents up near the cabin checking timelines and everything for when you were there. She's utterly ruthless. No stone left unturned. I honestly think that if either you or Hannibal have got anything buried she will turn it up. You haven't have you?'

'Did I say funny lady? I meant fucking hilarious. No I've got nothing. Taxes, liens, mortgage. I'm as squeaky clean as they come. I'm assuming Hannibal hasn't got too many skeletons in the cupboard given how anxious he is about people knowing about Mischa'

'Ok good. He better not turn out to be the Ripper. That'd be a bit crap'

'I mentioned hilarious didn't I? What's happening about that?'

'She's got some interns doing work on it, patterns, chasing down last knowns, witness statements, timelines. She's good. Jimmy said she was good and she is. Miriam has been in to go through some stuff. The list she had of medical personnel she interviewed? Which had Freddy and Hannibal on it? Fifteen more doctors, nurses, anaesthetists etc etc now.'

'Fifteen? Wow. Ok. That's good. How did they do that'

'Got Alana in to do some hypnotherapy and they all came tumbling out. Six of them, you'll love this. Six of them have interacted with a Ripper victim! Six! But if you work in a big hospital you see a lot of people and all six are surgical staff of some kind with Johns Hopkins, or the General, or the State. One of their surgeons did a calculation that in any given year in the ER she might see three to eight people herself for surgery in a ten hour shift, plus assorted family friends or hangers on. That could be anything from 3500 people up a year. And that's if you're conservative about it. Doesn't even include people you see briefly who then get handed on, if you're a surgical nurse you usually see more than that'

'Wow. Hannibal was in ER for ten years, well, ten and a bit. That's thirty five thousand people he might have interacted with. And that's only in the hospital itself, never mind the rest of his life'

'Yeah. Clarice is trying to help Miriam remember why she'd got these seventeen in particular. I think it's something to do with it being possible to track that the victim was directly treated by the name on the list. So it's a close match. Hannibal saw someone called Jeremy Olmstead or Ormstead or something. The wound man kill?'

'I know it. That's the one that Gideon re-created'

'Yeah. And get this. After Ormstead was treated by Hannibal, hunting accident of some kind, he actually was treated by Gideon the same year for a kidney op. His brother had renal failure and it was Gideon who carried our the surgery.

'Wow! Ok. I still don't know if I believe Gideon is the Ripper. And his mind is so fucked he may never know himself, poor sod'

'He's coming out of hospital this week. Back to the BSCHI, they can't decide whether to move him upstate or not when Frederick goes back. Oh and you'll love this Lawrence Wells has been transferred there'

'Lawrence Wells?'

'Jenga Man'

'Oh. Yeah, right. Really? Is he going to trial?'

'Not for a couple of months. They've done the pre-lims, no bail of course. Oh yeah, and I heard they might move Budge there too'

'You've got to be kidding me, not near Hannibal surely?'

'Don't know. Clarice told me they hadn't even got it in the records that it was Hannibal he'd tried to kill!'

'Roll on the return of Frederick Chilton, at least Jimmy would keep him on his toes'

'Yeah. Apparently they had a bit of an argument'

'Oh? I'm sorry about that. What? Why?'

'Oh I think Fredrick is just a bit jealous that Jimmy's so bothered about Hannibal being incarcerated in Fredrick's hospital. Or he's annoyed because Frederick was just slightly gleeful at the prospect of having Hannibal under his care!'

'Ok. Is it perverse of me that part of me would quite like to be a fly in the wall for some of their conversations? I wish he and Brian would get back together'

'Yeah well. Brian has spent quite a bit of time with Freddie'

'I know. She told me. She's still on side. So, you know. I'll take that as a win for now. Just as long as she doesn't break Brian's heart, again'

Bev pauses, changes the topic, 'You alright?'

'I miss him. Badly'

.....

Rust puts his head round the door 'Will, how are you?'

'Hey Rust, alright come in'

'Ok, I've got these things for you to put on. I'm going to hold the IV and we're going to do some careful manoeuvring of that arm'

Ten minutes later Will has a haori wool jacket on with the tube of the IV running down his loose sleeve. Rust has also got him into some pants over his hospital gown and socks and shoes. He's got an FBI cap too.

'Not to play the fool but what's happening Rust?'

'Taking you to the front door of the hospital, someone will take you from there. I'm going back to the room. Make it look like you're still around'

Will resigns himself. Kidnapped by his friend. Alright.

At the front door another man, someone he doesn't know helps him into the backseat of a car. Rust wheels the chair away.

Thirty minutes later they pull up outside the rear entrance of the BSCHI. Agent Starling is waiting for him

'We're a few days ahead of schedule, because your doctor says your progress is good, she hopes this will help. So do I. The deal is I get you into a visitor room, it's the nearest one to the back entrance, I'm sorry we can't take a chair. One because there are steps and two because you're officially here as FBI. So the chair won't cut it. There's going to be a little accident with the camera, for about ten minutes. You get ten minutes alone with Dr Lecter. And then it'll be the two of us. No orderly, no prison officers. The next thirty minutes will be on tape and on the monitor, it's why you've got the hat. I'm going to ask you to remove your glasses too. Good job your hair is long it's always ears that are distinctive. Any questions?'

'In the thirty minutes what do you need to know about?'

'I want to know anything Abigail Hobbs ever said to him in his therapy sessions with her'

'Ok. I know they had maybe nine sessions, I was there for one, no two of them, and Alana was there for at least two others. So that's what, five? Plus the session at the house and the one with the Minnesota police, Hannibal drove Abigail and Alana there.'

'Good. See. I didn't know some of that. Who was at the house?'

'Alana, Abigail, Freddie Lounds, the journalist? and Hannibal'

'Not you?'

'No, I was out with my dad and Agent Katz'

'Ok. Good. There's my signal. That's Barney, he's an orderly here, he's alright. Come on. Lean on me as much as you need'

.....

For the third time today Hannibal has been brought to a visitor room. This is a new one to him, it's usually further inside the building nearer the front. Maybe it is because it is evening. The usual rigmarole happens and he is shackled on a long chain to the ubiquitous bolted down table. Unusually the chair is not bolted down. But there's little he could do with it. Well. Actually there's plenty. But he won't.

He sits as instructed. Closes his eyes and waits. How long it takes for a visitor to be processed can vary so he may have to wait for up to half an hour. He might consider the Duomo in Florence as seen from the Belvedere. A fine view, beautiful. He will share this with Will one day he is sure. He smiles. The door opens, someone enters, and then it closes behind them.

'So, I don't know anyone who can work the whole blue prison jumpsuit thing, but honestly it's a good look on you'

Hannibal's eyes snap open 'Will!'

'Yeah. I know. Ok. The way to do this is to hold one hand right beside the bolt on the table, perfect, now the other hand has maximum play on the chain and if you lift your arm I can just slide down there under it and there we are, I can sit on you. You can put your arm down now. Excellent you're still quite comfortable to sit on. You should probably hug me or kiss me or something'

Hannibal laughs 'I don't understand' he kisses Will then and they spend a few quiet moments of joyful closeness 'how?'

'You can thank Agent Starling. You get oh, eight more minutes of me exclusively then you get the pair of us. For another thirty minutes. Alright?'

'Better than alright. How are you? You're not so heavy'

'L'il shit. That's cos some idiot got themselves arrested and thrown in the asylum. So he can't feed me stupid amounts of grub. Kiss me again. I've missed you so much'

Hannibal obliges. It may not be easy to hold someone close to you when your hands are shackled but he makes the best of it he can 'I love you Will'

'Too right. I love you too. No snogging Bev by the way. You'll be out of here before I am I bet, she's says she'll snog you'

'Foolish man'

Will's alarm on his cell goes 'ok, I've got two minutes left. Anything you want to say?'

'Don't get pulled back into any live crime scenes, promise me, even if they threaten you, or me, promise'

Will nods 'yeah. I promise. Chiyoh's summary of my work for the FBI? I'm either a tool, (not that kind, well, maybe that kind?) or a scapegoat'

'I did tell you she'd say something of the sort'

'Yeah smart arse. And what's with these handcuffs and chains? No bondage until we discuss it. Did you forget or something?'

he kisses Hannibal hard and then slides out from under his arm and off his lap and pushes himself round to the other side of the table into one of the chairs there.

Agent Starling comes in 'ok Dr Graham?' She leans over and adjusts his hat and removes his glasses, he smiles and shifts his chair round further so his back is more to the camera. She takes the other chair

'Hello Dr Lecter. I'm Agent Starling'

'Ahhh. Yes, Clarice'

'Hannibal' says Will with just a hint of warning 'play nice'

Chapter 3

Will is lying in his hospital bed looking up at the ceiling. He's more grateful than he can say that Clarice got him in to see Hannibal. But now he misses him even more. They're supposed to be going to Florence and then Venice in three weeks time. It's looking unlikely right this minute. He sighs sadly. Gets out his cell. Looks for the number and phones their travel agent

'Megan? This is Will Graham. Yes. That's right. I'm sorry to say there's a bit of a hiccup. We're currently both in hospital! I know. I know. At the moment it looks debatable veering towards unlikely. How much notice would you like? Ok. Alright. No, we've got insurance. Ok. I'll ask him. Thank you. Until then. Bye'

So, as he's ill in hospital they will both be able to invoke that clause in the insurance. No mention of where exactly Hannibal is. Phew. Maybe Charles needs to be asked about that. Hmm. No one tells you these things. Does holiday insurance kick in if you've been incarcerated? And he's got seven more days to decide. How likely is it that Hannibal will be either exonerated or otherwise released in three weeks? He doesn't fancy their chances overall. Damn. Still. Maybe if Hannibal is released in the Spring, preferably this year, they can ask Chiyoh to let them use the cabin.

There's a knock on his door, Alana comes in somewhat tentatively hand resting on the door surround as if not sure she's really welcome.

'Alana, hello. This is unexpected, nice though, come on in. Help yourself to fruit. Freddie Lounds brings fruit. Who knew? She's got good taste in fruit. Any particular reason for a visit?'

'Hello Will. I'm sorry. I've come mainly to apologise. I've been to see Hannibal this morning. I feel rather responsible. So rather than duck it I thought I'd actually come and say so.'

She comes into the room and pushes the door to behind her. Will points to the best of the three chairs and she sits.

Will blinks 'thank you. Can I ask what prompted it?'

'When I saw Hannibal and asked about it all' she pauses 'did Bev tell you she told me? Ok. She did. When I saw Hannibal I just looked at him and thought it couldn't possibly be right. He was with me in Minnesota, he possibly saved me. I don't believe he was involved in Marissa's death. I just don't'

She wipes her eyes with a crumpled handkerchief

'The timing might be tight. But he couldn't have managed it all. I wanted to tell you, what I told him, I gave a statement to Agent Starling, about the timing. He couldn't have killed Marissa, got her to the cabin, got back to the house, and helped me. And he was concussed. We know that. If he'd killed Marissa and someone else took her away, Abigail, Nick, whoever they would have been more definitive and I'm sure he would have got blood on himself. He

just couldn't. It doesn't add up. And I know he was with you when Cassie died. I believe that. Freddie Lounds says she checked your alibi for that evening. She's got the timeline! The one you did for Jack? I don't know how she has it..'

Will interrupts 'I gave it to her. She wanted to run it all down. I knew she'd be meticulous, or her guys would be. So I gave it to her. And she has been. Both Hannibal and I were seen all that afternoon and evening, we simply wouldn't have had time to retrieve Cassie Boyle from wherever she was and take her to the display site. Agent Starling's pretty happy with it. It ties together.'

'So what's left?'

'There's physical evidence in the car. Hair and a bloodied knife. Except. And I like this, some of the blood on the knife is Elise Nicholls' and Hannibal's cell was triangulated and he was in Baltimore the weekend she died. He spoke to me, and several other people over the relevant Friday and Saturday. Saturday afternoon, well, lunchtime, he actually saw Iris Komeda in a small gallery in Baltimore, he was thinking about buying a print, they had tea together. An unplanned meeting which is why it wasn't in his planner.'

'But that's good. The hair?'

'Is Marissa Schurr's. No explanation, except it was planted. But no proof. So, because Hannibal can't be tied to her death by anything else it's a free floating bit of evidence. The fishing flies are more problematic. The timing for when they were placed there if it wasn't by one of us is very very tight'

'Oh'

'Yeah. Oh. The two which have got remains from Cassie and Marissa in have been removed from the discussion. They both had other remains in too. So, where there's overlap with the other flies they've been discounted as well. Which leaves two flies. As it happens one made by me and one made by Hannibal. Which have been added to'

'Two fishing flies?'

'Yup. And that is it. That plus I have an alibi for all but one of the Shrike girls and Hannibal has an alibi for all of them. All of them. Patient appointments for four of them, shared opera box for one, consulting on a case in DC for one, one in the cabin with Chiyoh and Mischa and three other friends they spent two days and two evenings with, and lastly, the opening of the Evil Minds Museum, where you are Hannibal's alibi'

'Oh my god. We had dinner before hand, I helped him prepare and cook! I must have got there about four pm. He didn't drop me until, maybe 1am. Actually he came in and had a drink, so closer to 2am. Oh my. I had no idea.'

'Good job Alana. I mean it. It's great. The worst that he could be accused of is making the flies. Me too. I'm taking it as a win, especially as Abigail made the claim about Matthew Brown planting them. Though I still can't for the life of me see how that ties in anywhere'

'So, why hasn't Hannibal been released?'

'The prosecution is still looking at it all. And. And this is the less good bit. Of course Abigail is still missing, and she pretty much accused Hannibal of being the Ripper, and unfortunately that's on tape, well, a cell phone digital recording'

'Oh, of course, I'm being slow. So he can't be the Shrike, but he still might be...?'

They both look at each other. The Ripper is a whole other ball game!

'But they can't keep him on that basis can they?'

'Apparently. Shouldn't. But because the court made the initial decision it was the BSCHI and not the general population, he can be held indefinitely on the possibility that he is'

'Who is looking for Abigail?'

'Jack was being half hearted about it. Starling isn't! She's on it. We've also got a few people out looking'

'Bev told me. This strange mountain thing?'

'You've got it. I'm happy to have weird on side, I really am. You too. It's good to see you Alana. I hope we'll look forwards and not back'

Alana smiles 'I'm sorry. I was a shit. Margot has basically given me a few home truths. She was pretty blunt. I might have been jealous. Sorry'

'That's ok. We're good. And I'm glad Gideon didn't get you'

'I know. I haven't even really said thank you. You saved me. Margot wanted to get you a private room somewhere or ask if you had any vacation needs once you're out of here'

Will smiles, 'no you're fine. Nice of her though. Kind. We should definitely all have dinner together maybe just the four of us. Make up properly. Once we're both released'

'Thank you Will. I'm really grateful. Can I ask? How are you now?'

.....

'Alright Cohle, thanks for coming by. I appreciate it, you got anything to say to me?'

'Agent Starling. This is one mighty mess you've inherited. I think that's the bulk of what I want to say to you. A mighty mess. You closing in at all?'

'Ongoing investigation and everything? We're not having this conversation you understand? But I know you were police. Good too'

'You've checked?'

'I know people who know you. We're just one big family'

Rust snorts. Though it's not a bad analogy, it's a pretty dysfunctional family. Also explains why they're meeting in a diner and not in Quantico. They've both ordered breakfast. Eat, piss, sleep while you can, a good rule of thumb.

'Alright then. What I've heard Lecter's off the menu for the Shrike girls and the two others? You focusing on Abigail and what was on the recording?'

'I'm only interested in Abigail Hobbs. The rest of it, well, you can read it too many ways. Personally I think Dr Lecter was trying to be too smart for his own good. But stress and worry can take a person that way. I've spoken with his sister, she's pretty clear, and the hospital recorded when they arrived that evening, when she was left with Will Graham. We've also got a reasonable time line. CCTV, a gas stop, a diner. That kind of thing. If he did take her then he had almost zero time to dump her.'

'So, just the Hobbs girl? What about the rest of the Ripper stuff?'

'It's always been our problem with the Ripper. Making a connection. Will Graham talk you through the numbers?'

'He has. You're in a bind. Looks to me like there's a good number of people who might have done it, but you've got nothing further?'

'Surely so. We've got zero physical evidence. It's all conjecture. Even the guy who died last year, the private medical tech? He's not classified as a Ripper kill. It's a bit of a problem because Graham was involved in the case. But short of going back and undoing everything he's been involved in. Well you can see my problem'

They stop for a few minutes when their breakfast arrives and they sort out flat ware and condiments and additions for the strong coffee the waitperson brings.

'So, it really is about the girl? How long will you hold him on that conjecture?'

'It's going to come to the preliminary hearing. That's a week away. They might extend custody for another month. I'm real hoping not. But the press has done Lecter some serious damage. Not with the people who know him, I've got an intern handling all the positive calls we're getting. But the general public. It's because he's a great looking suspect.'

'He fits a lot of profile points, single, white, male, right skills, right age range. But then, so do I'

'So do a lot of people. It's inadequate. And really it shouldn't have got this far. But it has so I work with what's in front of me'

'You telling Dr Lecter all this?'

'Yes. I'm not trying to catch him out and frankly he's being useful about this other stuff I'm dealing with'

'The Buffalo Bill case?'

'The very same. We've been given that now so I've got the science team on that, that and the people dump. Takes them off worrying about their friend too'

'It's a nasty one.'

'It surely is. So can I rely on you to keep on the Hobbs girl? We're going to get spread tight, Senator Martin has me on speed dial'

'Ok. I can do that. You buying this breakfast'

'Sure. I'm known for my appetite I can swing two on the receipt'

They smile slightly at each other. Neither especially big on the whole social niceties, and now with a kind of common cause.

.....

'Use the fucking lotion'

Down in the hole Catherine Martin snivels but does what her captor says. She's tired, hungry, and thirsty. She tried peeing just in one corner but that didn't really work so she smells and is terrified. It had got worse when she discovered two broken fingernails embedded in the crumbling mortar of the pit she's in.

The pit, maybe an old well, or a storage hole is brick lined and at first she'd wondered if she might be able to climb. The discovery of the nails covered in glitter polish made her think again. She'd screamed and then stuffed her fingers into her mouth as if not wanting to feed her captor or her own fear.

She didn't pay much attention to anything on the television about the case, sure she kind of knew some guy was taking girls. Big girls but so what. Not her. It's never you, until it is. She knows her mother would do anything, to get her out. But she's not stupid. It might not be enough or it might not be soon enough. She's been in the hole for maybe 24 hours. Vaguely she thinks she heard he keeps them for a few days. So, she's not dead yet. Not yet. And she is her mother's daughter.

.....

'Ok, Dr Lecter, Senator Martin did the whole TV thing. She kept to the script, she did pretty well. It's upped the number of calls were getting but I'm not sure if that's where we'll catch him.'

'Is she going to come here? The senator?'

'I think she'd like to. Would you be willing?'

'Does she understand of what I'm accused? Not everyone will appreciate her seeking help from a suspected serial killer currently in a hospital for the criminally insane'

'I don't think she's got the electorate on her mind right now'

'Tell her I'm willing if she is'

'Alright then. I will. I'm going to ask Dr Graham if he'll see her too?'

'Will? May I ask why'

'Because he'll reassure her about your good intentions, and if there's even the faintest chance she might put pressure on where it's due then we might get you out after the preliminary hearing. It's a gamble, but I'd sure like to play that hand if we have it'

'Thank you. It seems you are now convinced of my innocence?'

'I'll be frank. I think you'd prefer that?'

Hannibal nods, intrigued by her positioning

'You're innocent of the Shrike girls, you're innocent of the two other girls. I think the evidence connecting you to Abigail Hobbs disappearance is circumstantial. I don't subscribe to the idea that the last person we think saw her alive is the person who caused her death. We don't know if she's dead. I have no idea if you're the Ripper or not.'

He raises his eyebrows at her, and she carries relentlessly onwards

'If you are, then you've been incredibly fastidiously disciplined about it. I'd say you haven't killed in more than two years unless you changed your MO so much that we can't see you any more. If you are and you've either temporarily stopped or changed or have actively given up, there is almost zero chance we will get you as the Ripper. We might get you in another version of yourself, although I think the Ripper would be somewhat loathe to give up on where he's got to now, but to all intents and purposes the Ripper is dead. And I don't flog dead horses. Not when there are active ones.'

'You simply don't know if I am or not?'

'That's what I'm saying. I have plenty of people telling me you're not. You know an awful lot of wealthy and powerful people, and have treated a fair few too. I can mostly ignore them. The two people are can't ignore are your sister and Will Graham'

Hannibal continues to study her face intently. They're still standing about four feet apart, just outside each other's personal space. Of course there are the bars of Hannibal's cell between them but nothing interrupts their line of sight.

'If you are the Ripper then I'd have expected you to stop when you're sister arrived in the USA. You wouldn't have risked her freedom or happiness. But the kills continued for two years after she arrived'

Hannibal can see the logic of this, he nods briefly, so she carries on

'however if you had been unable to curb your proclivities and carried on after she arrived I'd have to wonder why you stopped 27 months ago. I've looked back into your history, and there are no major incidents in your own time line that might explain either a change of MO that

haven't spotted, or a reason to stop. And in that period we have no unaccounted for one-offs or sprees or pairs or even serials that we haven't attributed to someone. Except for a medical insurance tech, who Will Graham said was not a Ripper kill (yeah yeah I know why that could come into question, moving on). All of the previous intervals between Ripper sounders have been less than 20 months. There isn't a standard variation. But 27 months would be exceptional and a definite outlier.'

'And Will?'

'Obviously I don't know him well. But he's been right about absolutely every other case he's turned his attention to. I know he's struggled with the Ripper. And some would say it's not a coincidence that you and he have become a couple during the period when he was supposed to be looking. But I also trust his instincts. I don't believe he'd be so wrong about you. Even if he is, or rather just if he is what I do know is that the Ripper is currently dormant or dead. I'd like to think the latter. What do you say Dr Lecter'

'I think I would like to agree with you rather fervently'

'I'm glad we understand each other'

When she's gone ten minutes later Hannibal wonders if she does in fact think he is the Ripper and if so if in effect she's cutting her losses and giving him a free pass. If that's the case then she is both very smart and a whole lot more creative than either Paul Krendler and Jack Crawford combined.

.....

'You know what Will called this?'

'What Z?'

'People soup. He was taking the piss after Bev showed him the photos from the scene'

Jimmy and Brian look at the six bodies lying on the tables in the autopsy suite. They're all prepped and waiting.

'Is Bev coming?'

'She is, she had to go and brief Jack, he's been allowed back into this case. Clarice is spread too thin'

'Fair enough. Not perfect but ok. Z, What about Agent Krendler?'

'Seconded to liaison with the Senator. Clarice's idea. Seems to be working out ok. She did the press interview. Followed Hannibal's script. Good job, did you see it?'

'Yes. She did do a good job. She's coming here.'

'Here here, or just Quantico here?'

'Us. She's going to see Will in the hospital then Hannibal and then she's coming here. Of course mainly to see Clarice but apparently us too'

'Jims, Isn't it slightly fucked up that Will has basically been hospitalised by the Feds and Hannibal imprisoned also because of the Feds and yet they're still working their guts out on this case? I mean, I don't believe it's only me that sees how shit this is'

'Chiyoh told Will that the FBI sees him as either a tool or a scapegoat. It hasn't escaped his attention that at the moment he's the tool and Hannibal is the scapegoat. God. I hate it so much. I should just take an early pension or something.'

'Do you mean that Jimmy? What would you do?'

'Oh I don't know. I probably don't mean it. It's just. I went to see Hannibal yesterday. We talked about the stuff with Abigail, about Will, about Buffalo Bill. It was just a great big bucket of sad. He's just about holding it together, but it's getting to him. That fucking orderly is still harassing him'

'Abigail's cousin? Really? I thought, what's his face, what is Frederick's deputy called? I don't care enough about him to remember'

'Jameson'

'Ok. Really? That's not what I thought at all. Ok. So won't Jameson act on it, sort it out?'

'None of it was ever reported so he's got no grounds to suspend him, and he's arguing that if he makes an adjustment for one inmate he'd have to do it for all of them'

'That's sincerely rubbish'

'I'm surprised by how calm he and Will are being about everything'

'This week!'

'Yeah alright Z. I know, really. When are they letting Will out? Does he know?'

'Next week. Just before Hannibal's preliminary hearing'

'Really? But if that goes the way we think it will then they could both be out in what eleven days time? That's fantastic, isn't it?'

Brian makes a face, 'it is. But if Hannibal is remanded it will be shit for Will. And Jack's already gearing up to get him back for this one. That's why Bev took the photos in'

'But he mustn't! He's not well enough to'

'He says he can look at pictures. I think we have to help him not do more than that. Pictures and he can come to the lab and the bar. Mostly the bar, or the canteen. Or out. Actually if Hannibal doesn't get out we will need a plan to look after Will. '

When Bev walks in they smile at her tiredly

'Well your two are just joy and gladness and clearly I'm delight. Wassup boys?'

'Just talking about looking after Will when he gets out. And what to do if Hannibal doesn't'

The look on her face says it all. Not delight then.

.....

In his mind palace Hannibal approaches a plain wooden door. He slides it and walks through into the room he uses at Chiyoh's Cabin, through the window beyond he can see the chestnut tree in its autumn glory. In his mind palace this room is always bathed in the golden glow of October sun.

He sits down on the futon, realising as he does so that he is wearing one of the cotton yukata he keeps there. It's dark red with embroidered cranes around the bottom and along the collar and lapels. Comfortable, he picks up a book lying beside the futon and begins to read. He still enjoys the fact that in his mind palace he doesn't need his reading glasses. The book is a collection of short Japanese folk tales. Not utterly dissimilar to Aesops fables, they each have some meaning or teaching embedded in them.

He's read maybe three when the door is slid open again 'here you are! I've been looking all over for you'

Hannibal puts down the book 'hello Will'

Will drops down beside him on the futon and pushes him down onto his back with the press of his mouth and one hand to his shoulder. Like Hannibal Will is wearing a cotton yukata, his is dark blue, decorated with koi carp.

'I should have checked where you'd be. I've walked around for ages. Do you even clean some of the older rooms ever? I've sneezed an awful lot Hannibal. Sneezed! Allergies, I tell you. Allergies. I might be allergic to you, you know, what's to be done about that?'

'My darling'

In the BSCHI Hannibal Lecter turns on his left side with his eyes closed and smiles just a little.
In Johns Hopkins hospital Will Graham turns on his right side, also with his eyes closed and smiles, rather more vividly. After all, what are Mind Palaces for?

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Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

> Will is very bored of hospital. But it's better than the alternatives. Jack is an asshat. Kade Prurnell is worse. Both SoTL and Kaiseki. And Hannibal's preliminary hearing is coming up. And Bev? She just wants it to be nice again. Please? Pretty please? Oh. And no people soup.

Lunch has just passed, or what passes for lunch had passed. Will has had plenty of opportunity to lament the fact that his current time in hospital has been paralleled by Hannibal's hopefully temporary incarceration in the BSCHI. This means lots of things, firstly no one to really grumble at properly, secondly no hospital appropriate cuddles, thirdly no hospital inappropriate cuddles and other things (*blush*), fourthly no one to explain the more complicated aspects of his treatment, and fifthly NO NICE FOOD. He could manage a whole grumble on this alone.

He looks down at the tray. Nope, no, niet, nada. Yuk. Ahh he thinks to himself, he is both sulking and hungry, oh, and on his own. No one here to share in his misery. His friends have been brilliant at splitting time between whatever it is they're supposed to be doing and visiting him. And really everyone has been fantastic. He's also up to speed on all the latest DVD releases, everything you can get on netflix, celebrity gossip he didn't even know he didn't need to know, and finally he thinks he's got the hang of tumblr. Maybe.

But there is a big gap in his life, a big Lithuanian psychiatrist six language speaking three-piece wearing lummox of a Hannibal shaped gap. And that got old real fast. Still Will is being let out this week; he smirks to himself, it's on good behaviour. I.e. He has actually managed to not stress himself out so ridiculously that he's been flattened again. And he has utterly promised not to go to any scenes. Nope. Not. No. Nada. Niet.

Especially people soup! He doesn't want to go anywhere near people soup. When Bev and Jimmy and Brian had last come in to visit they had smelled so bad he had gagged and then insisted they open all the windows. They were a bit affronted. He grins at the memory. Bev had got away with not going into the water, they hadn't got the right size waders. But there was a great picture doing the rounds of Brian and Jimmy trying not to fall over as they retrieved the final body. If only it had been a gif set.

So, he taps his fingers on the bed, what to do, what to do. He knows that brother Elk is back and outside the room. He's indicated sort of that Brother Hawk or Rust will be around at some point today to tell him about Abigail and how that's going. Hmm he notices just the faintest increase in his heart rate in the monitor. Not so good.

Murasaki is going to visit with Chiyoh this afternoon and maybe Mischa too. Hmm heart rate stayed the same. That's probably mostly to do with him still not really able to get his head round Murasaki and Robertus. They're definitely working the social elite thing, Rust told him that the Feds actually have a dedicated line for everyone who wants to make positive calls or send personal letters etc of support for Hannibal. It's kind of sweet, but Will wonders if it might actually be counter-productive. Hmm heart rate up.

Ok. Think of something calming. A nurse comes in and retrieves the tray, making a face at how much he has left, though Will knows she will snaffle the pudding he didn't even open. She's a fan of vanilla pudding. Which is fine as far as Will is concerned. He'd read but he's bored himself with his own book choices. Thinking he might read something sensible or interesting he's found the medication has given him the attention span of a gnat. So his choices remain marked a couple of chapters in. But he can't manage the trivia of gossip mags. But right now, he'd take almost anything.

He changes his mind five minutes later.

'Hello Will, you've met Paul Krendler before, this is Kade Prurnell. She's with the office of the Inspector General.'

'Jack hello, Paul. Ms Prurnell, please help yourself to a seat, they're more or less comfortable'

Jack sits on one that is definitely at the less comfortable end of the spectrum. Will keeps his face suitably blank when he sees Jack wince.

He turns to look at Kade Prurnell, she looks like the person in the room who is going to be in charge. She is,

'Dr Graham, I'm here because you're going to be called as a witness in the opening remarks for the preliminary hearing for Hannibal Lecter. Obviously the Bureau has a stake in the sorts of thing you might say on the stand and I'm here, with support from my,' and she pauses here as though it's a slightly bad taste in her mouth 'colleagues, to explore your potential testimony'

Will blinks. No one has said anything to him about testimony. As far as he knew it would be opening statements, outline of evidence being brought to bear, the timetable of when the case will actually be brought, if indeed there is one that will be brought at all. Last time he and Starling had talked she thought the case would be dropped. Will is mildly surprised that Charles or his associate hasn't been to see him to talk tactics.

'Ok. I didn't know I was going to be called. I didn't know anyone was going to be. I mean, no one's discussed it with me. I thought it was just a preliminary, you know, is there enough for the prosecution to go ahead or is it going to be dropped, or no case to answer? I thought there wouldn't be any testimony?'

Jack shifts uncomfortably 'the Judge is hearing it in private, there's a lot of press interest and we thought it'd be better this way. He's ruled he'd like to hear some expert testimony before proceeding. If he decides to proceed'

Will looks between them 'expert testimony?'

Kade Prurnell speaks up 'Frederick Chilton is going to give an assessment of Dr Lecter's psychological state. I've asked Alana Bloom to speak to his interactions from a professional perspective with Abigail Hobbs. One of the BAU science team is going to present the physical evidence we have, and Agent Crawford and Agent Starling are going to speak to the case in both broader and specific senses'

Slowly Will looks between Paul and Jack 'But isn't Frederick in hospital, how can he testify? And, wait. This sounds like prosecutorial evidence? Are you saying that all these people are being asked to speak on behalf of the prosecution?'

Kade Prurnell answers him 'all of them have been asked to speak in a professional capacity, it isn't a conflict, and Dr Chilton is being heard via link up'

Faintly Will hears his heart monitor beep a little more urgently,

'every one of those people except Agent Starling would count themselves a friend of Hannibal Lecter. How can it be anything other than both a conflict and a travesty. This is pretty outrageous. Has the defence team seen this list? Who else is on it?'

Ms Prurnell purses her lips and hands a piece of paper to Paul Krendler, sitting nearest to Will in the raised hospital bed. Will takes it looking at Jack. Who is keeping suspiciously quiet. Will scans the list. It's as Kade Prurnell said. Except his name is at the bottom.

'Why am I on this list? I'm not a witness for the prosecution. I can't be'

'You're not protected by the legislation prohibiting spousal testimony. You're relationship with Dr Lecter is of a more casual nature, the prosecution intends to call you. I imagine they hope you're specific kind of skills as well as your relationship give you some unique insight'

Will hardly knows which bit of this little speech to start with 'You have got to be fucking kidding me?'

'Not in the slightest. I expect you'll be served with notice today or tomorrow. We'd like to talk you through your testimony'

Will is now aware that his heart monitor has started some kind of alarm, two of the ward nurses rush into the room and start whisper shouting to the three Feds to get out.

Will is beyond furious. The nurses have to sedate him to get his heart rate and blood pressure down to a reasonable level. Two hours later it is still elevated, putting unimaginable stress on his system. Already overtaxed.

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Much later that day Beverly is visiting Hannibal in the BSCHI. Brian is the one being called to the preliminary hearing so she and Jimmy had tossed over who got to see Hannibal today. She won, although she thinks she might have lost. When she gets there she finds out from

one of the orderlies what's happened. And that Hannibal has already been told about Will. And that Hannibal is currently barely responsive.

'Hannibal sweetie. Sweetie' she croons to him through the bars 'Will is ok. And apparently one of the nurses actually tipped coffee over Kade Prurnell, her own cup too, accidentally of course, but it was still pretty warm. She was wearing wool, pale wool, think how hard it'll be to get a coffee stain out?'

Hannibal manages the smallest of smiles.

'How is it that the FBI can reduce Will to a shell of himself in hospital, can coerce him into still helping with cases from his hospital bed, can threaten him with all kinds of recriminations if he doesn't cooperate, can harass him into testifying against his lover and partner, and reduce him to a state where he needs to be sedated to prevent a stroke or worse, and think that they have any right at all to expect his good will or cooperation? This is beyond me Beverly. I am especially upset with Jack'

Bev grimaces. She suspects that Hannibal knows that about three hours after Will's run in Bev had gone to see Will on Jack's instructions with new photos from the people soup case. He hadn't complained or fussed and had simply told her they were discards and that they were looking for a collector. Of some kind. He'd been so tired that was pretty well all he said and had suggested she might get more from Hannibal. Oh and please tell him he's ok.

Bev had been bemused at the time, what was that all about. But she gets it now, great, thanks Jack, make her be the bad insensitive, shitty guy. So she is pretty pissed with Jack too. Normally she defends him, she likes her boss, normally. She likes her job, normally. Not today.

'It's shit Hannibal. That's all I've got to say. It's shit. Do you know about the hearing?'

Hannibal looks at her 'my lawyer is visiting tomorrow. Why? I know Will is being compelled to testify for the prosecution'

Ok thinks Bev, his information gathering is top notch, she barely knows this, and here's a win for team Bev she won't have to tell him the bit about Will, but she does have to tell him about the others, she grits her teeth, 'and Alana, and Frederick, and Brian and Jack'

Hannibal just looks at her.

'I know' she sighs the biggest sigh. 'And it's behind closed doors so no one else on our side will be there. Actually that's not true Agent Starling will be there, though she's also testifying. Krendler will be there but no testimony. I have no idea what side he is on. Kade Prurnell won't be there. Though who knows if she's seen the judge. It's a potentially high profile federal case' she shrugs a bit. 'Rubbish isn't it. Really rubbish.'

'Agent Starling had suggested it seemed likely the prosecution might deem there to be no case, or at least not enough of a case to answer. Do you think that has changed?'

'I don't know. I didn't think so. We've got nothing new, that I know of, and yeah, I know I shouldn't be telling you any of this. Fuck it' she glares at the camera 'I think I'm already going to be suspended'

Hannibal looks at her 'Beverly, not on my account, please!'

'I've said some fairly brutal things in a report I wrote, I know Alana did too. We think we're both looking at some kind of reprimand. Good! It makes me feel I haven't compromised all my principles, or I hope I haven't. We were both asked to withdraw the reports which makes me feel I said some of the right things. It's got to be on record that they've shafted both you and Will!'

Hannibal smiles slightly more at her 'thank you Beverly. I do appreciate everything you're doing'

'I miss you both. We have a lot of fun together. And yeah I know that sounds bad given what we do. But outside of work? It's great. Really. I count my blessings every day. Every day. I want it to be like how it was'

'It will be. Better even. Once Will is no longer in the field.'

'And you're out of here'

'Ahh. Yes'

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In the hole Catherine Martin has a plan. A fuck off excellent, screw you and your fucking poodle plan. For the umpteenth time today she is shredding part of her shirt. So far she has a long knotted length of cotton strips, maybe about 15 feet or so. She needs another five feet. She's been careful to strip her shirt and skirt from the bottom where the damage isn't so obvious.

She's hoarded a few chicken bones that shitface threw down on her to eat. Bastard. He seems to be feeding her just enough to make sure that she doesn't pass out, and he does lower what seems to be ok water in a bottle several times a day. And the lotion. Which she has to rub into her skin regularly. What is this? Some kind of extreme sports spa treatment? She does more or less what she's told, he made sure she saw the big Colt Python he is armed with. Well. Fuck this shit.

She has a plan. And to be fair it's not much of a plan but it's still a fucking plan. She carries on with the shredding using her teeth to get through the material before she can rip it loose. Shame he'd taken her own shirt from her, that was much bigger and would have been easier to rip, this is some cotton poly blend and is a bitch on her teeth and hands. She'd eye roll herself, "and Catherine is wearing the autumn collection of new designs; clothing for the potential abductee", if she wasn't still just really fucking scared. Still her mother's daughter though.

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Hannibal stands at the farthest end of his cell and angles himself so he can almost see who is coming along the corridor. He's astounded to see Abel Gideon. Upright and walking though clearly still in some pain. Or maybe just stiff from a hospital stay as well as the effects of being shot by Will. The two guards don't look especially overjoyed to have him back. He's not popular in the prison. The nurse he killed earlier in the year was. Doing for Freddy Chilton was one thing but she was a different kettle of fish.

'Abel? How are you? Are you recovered? I imagine Will rather regrets shooting you'

'Well Dr Lecter? Aren't we going to be a little educated corner of the BSCHI? I can imagine that our good friend Dr Chilton is just going to love having us to tea when he comes back. When is that do you know?'

'I'm told Frederick is recovering well, maybe another month or six weeks?'

'Well, isn't that just the damndest thing. And there I was thinking Ms Lounds didn't have it in her'

'She worked pretty tirelessly to keep him alive'

'And you were there to step in, and just do that bit more. Saved the day and all that. There's a certain irony in it don't you think?'

'Now that I'm here, in theory under his care?'

'Precisemento, though I gather that was why it was so easy for me to have a little trip with your lovely boy, he is rather sweet. And I have forgiven him already. All those lovely curls? Hard not to. And yes, Frederick, just think, he'll be back and you'll be both his hero and his hobby. How will you manage it? He won't know whether to fawn or fondle, wouldn't you say?'

'We'll have to see'

'Oh, you're hoping to be out by then aren't you? Of course you are. Well. Let's not count any chickens shall we? And speaking of eggs in baskets, you didn't say, how is my little would be nemesis? Dr Graham? Is he alright, he looked very poorly indeed?'

'He's recovering, Abel. I'll pass on your wishes'

'You should, you should, we had a brief but meaningful relationship, I'd like him to know I still hold a torch for him. Any dark place he wants to go I'll be happy to tag along. And now, if you'll excuse me I have some reacquainting to do with the intimacies of my cell. They kindly returned me to the one I was in before. Sweet isn't it. Hey ho'

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On a suburban commuter train, a white middle aged man dressed in farming overalls slides his way into a carriage just as the door is closing. He pushes his way carefully past the various passengers, holding on to the straps and poles up the train. It's moderately full but not

a total sweat. He eyes one man, young, African American, maybe with some Caribbean heritage too, whose skin is the shade of a proper caramel macchiato.

James Gray looks at him, the young man shifts slightly uncomfortable under the scrutiny

'You have beautiful skin'

Ok, not the weirdest thing anyone has ever said to him, but on a train? From some odd white guy? Some old odd white guy? Definitely in his top five of Weird.

Later, much later, much much later, when he awakes and he is at the centre of a cuddle pile of bodies sewn and lacquered together the remarks in the train are relegated out of the top ten of Weird shit that has happened to or been said to Roland Umber.

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Clarice Starling is officially shattered. Her dad would have said he was dang pooped. She finds herself smiling at the memory. He'd have slumped in his chair and put his hat on her head and pretended to be a rag doll just for a moment, his hands hanging down by the sides. And then she'd bring him a beer or tea depending on when his shift had ended.

She stretches. Mostly she'd like to go to the apartment the FBI has loaned her for the duration. She'd cook something, or get decent take out. Maybe talk to her partner Ardelia on the cell. Maybe read for a bit. She rolls her shoulder, there's a kink in there that just won't quite quit. She decides.

Thirty minutes later she is outside Hannibal Lecter's cell and has presented him with Japanese take out

'Its udon, and peanut sauce, and chicken, with vegetable gyoza. Barney says you can have the chopsticks'

She pushes everything through the food hatch. Hannibal decides not to tell her about the exhibition of Kung fu he once saw in Hong Kong where a young man had repeatedly thrown chopsticks with such force that they lodged in a piece of wood. Hannibal had decided at the time that even if it were balsa it was quite an impressive feat. When the board was shown to the audience it had transpired it was pine. Chopsticks aren't as benign as they might appear, and a broken one? A very useful tool.

They both eat companionably for ten minutes or so

'Dr Jameson allowed this?'

'He thinks I'm bribing you to get cooperation, I think he feels smug as he hasn't yet sunk as low'

'A shame, it might have a beneficial return with a number of us inmates, either as a reward or as a promise'

'Is that how you'd run this place?'

He smiles at her somewhat 'I wouldn't choose to run a place such as this. I'm in practice for a reason'

She considers this. Wonders whether there is a hook in there to latch on to. And decides not. She'd like to get him back on to Buffalo Bill. But of course she's heard about what happened to Will Graham today and realises this might not be the best moment to ask for help. Talk about hammering your own colleagues. They could have warned her. Still, the Ripper is Jack's greatest blind spot. And the stuff with Bella isn't helping.

'I know you want to ask Clarice. You may. I don't hold you responsible for the actions of your superiors'

he smiles at her, with just a hint of something in his eye she doesn't like the look of. She has a feeling there's going to be a bit of a test coming. He wouldn't undermine her, or jeopardise the Martin girl, but he doesn't have all the answers, just some of the right questions.

'Think Clarice, I want you to think about what he needs'

'I don't know, I don't know, attention, acceptance, to belong'

'No. That's what he wants. What does he need?'

Clarice sighs. This might be a long one, still neither Hannibal or she have anywhere else to be this evening. And if she's still here at midnight Barney will bring her cocoa or something.

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Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

> More Silence of the Lambs. And can the FBI ever stop manipulating either Hannibal or Will, or both of them?

Will looks at Clarice Starling and then at Bev. Jack doesn't say anything at all. Brian and Zeller are standing just behind him and Will thinks they might be trying desperately to not make faces at his back. He suppresses his own smile.

'I'm sorry if I'm being especially dense. What am I supposed to do with this?'

He waves a hand vaguely at the laptop that Jack brought with him and wordlessly dumped on the tray table that sits atop Will's hospital bed.

'It's simple Will. I know you hope that Hannibal will be released at the preliminary hearing. Clarice and he had a long conversation yesterday. It's possible he was feeling irritated by yesterday's events'

Jack doesn't apologise but gestures at the room, almost as though he'd played no part in Will's minor episode of the previous day. Will frowns, of course Jack thinks he made things better by being there. It hasn't occurred to him that Will just saw it as being yet another incident where Jack actively let him down.

Jack carries on 'I got Jameson to let me have the recording of the conversation, we'd like you to look, see if you can't spot anything we might have missed?'

'What? Why? Hannibal won't be messing around. He knows that the Martin girl is at risk'

'Yeah. But he's pretty abstruse sometimes. Can be hard to follow. You've got a better shot than anyone'

Will shakes his head. Tool and scapegoat, tool and scapegoat. Fucking cheek. But if he doesn't it'll reflect badly on both of them. And the words "preliminary hearing" keep cropping up in his mind

'Alright then. And why is everyone else here? I'm not objecting, just wondering?'

Bev snarks 'so we can leap into action if something comes to you? I guess? I mean, why else would we be here? Oh, and we get to watch home movies? I mean, that's gotta be good right? We can get soda and pop corn'

Jack growls at her 'that's enough Beverly'

'Really Jack?' She snarls back 'I honestly don't even begin to think it is'

Will smiles a little 'ok folks, get tea, coffee, soda, whatever, find chairs for everyone, we might as well be comfortable. Agent Starling how long is it?'

'Round about forty-five minutes'

Will looks at her 'wow, you let him ramble for that long? Damn, it'll go to his head. I'll have to listen to all kinds of shit when we're out. God. It might be good I'm seeing this. Make sure his ego doesn't get too stroked!'

He chuckles a bit, and the science team smile too. They've seen Hannibal go into lecture mode and watched Will poke at him to make sure he doesn't inflate too much. Everyone gets a chair and Jimmy closes the blinds against the weak winter/spring sunshine. They spend a bit of time getting everyone settled. Brian it transpires did bring two large bags of popcorn, and ignoring Jack's stern visage everyone tucks in.

Ten minutes in and Will is wheezing with laughter.

Clarice stops the DVD 'ok what?'

'Oh Hannibal your anagrams are showing. He's been just a bit naughty. Louis Friend? It's an anagram'

The group in front of him pause, desperately trying to work it out

'Iron Sulphide? Shit. Fool's gold?'

Will, winks and points at Clarice 'spot on. He's basically saying that without more info this is going to be quite a lot of conjecture. Apart from that he's being straight with you completely. Keep going'

Clarice frowns slightly and switches the laptop back to watch mode. They see Clarice and Hannibal have a long discussion about her background. Will looks serious now, and at a gesture from him Clarice pushes pause again.

'Good job Clarice. He's always more forthcoming with people who are open. He had a shit enough time in his childhood. That you were upfront with something like this? He clearly trusts you enough to encourage you to open up. He only does that with people he likes. If he's not interested he won't want to know anything about you.'

He glances round at the rest of the group, all of them have laid themselves bare at some time to Hannibal's considerable gaze.

'He's not being unkind. He genuinely wants to know. It also helps him understand your motivation in the case. What closing it will mean to you. I know it's a bit callous. But Hannibal is interested in motivation.'

Will stops, he seems to have thought of something else. He shrugs resignedly, and Clarice presses play again

Hannibal says 'so, of each particular thing we must consider what is he in his nature, what does he do this man you seek?'

'He kills women'

Hannibal shakes his head, frustrated, 'no that's incidental, What needs does he serve by killing them?'

Clarice gets up from her chair and paces 'Anger, social acceptance, frustration?'

Hannibal digs into the bottom of his take out carton 'No, he covets. How do we begin to covet Clarice, do we seek out things to covet? Do make an effort to answer now'

She frowns hard

He can see her frustration 'We begin by coveting what we see every day, don't you feel eyes moving over your body? Clarice. Don't your eyes seek out the things you want?'

Clarice presses pause again 'what's that about? I thought, well, what do you think?'

'He's worked out why he's choosing them. The quote is from Marcus Aurelius. It's a passage about how the subject is knower, known and knowing' Will's voice is somewhat flat 'when you went to the BSHCI did you take anything with you?'

'Japanese take out and some of his drawings. He'd asked for them and I persuaded Jameson to let him have them. Why'

'He's flirting. Just a bit. He likes you.'

Everyone in the room shifts a little. Clarice looks as though she wants to say something more, but wisely doesn't. Will looks slightly withdrawn 'go on'. She presses play

Hannibal smiles into his carton 'ah Clarice, people will say we're in love,' He sighs then,

'You think if you save Catherine Martin, you won't wake up in the dark, to that awful screaming, the screaming of the Lambs?'

'I don't know, honestly Dr Lecter, I don't know'

'Brave Clarice, you will let me know when those lambs stop screaming. We can only hope. Thank you Clarice'

She presses pause again, looks slightly ashamed

'Sorry Will'

She looks at him, his eyes are full of tears he doesn't shed. She knows she's guilty of one huge manipulation. She hadn't realised how much Will might see that she hadn't, though she's watched the DVD eight times already. Hannibal manipulated by Clarice, Hannibal

manipulating back, all of his words speaking to multiple layers of meaning. Lots to see and interpret if you look through the eyes of his partner.

'Ok' Will says 'apart from the ritual humiliation I experience in almost all my interactions with the FBI. And I'm only going to hope you hadn't realised. There are a few things.'

He sighs, and shakes his head minutely 'Ok. There are three things, firstly go back to the original victim, she's the one that kicked it all off, she's what he wants to be, not her precisely, but like her, secondly, he's harvesting the skins right? He's making something from the skins,' he pauses and swallows 'he's making himself a new person suit, he's not comfortable in his own skin so he wants to be in someone else's, thirdly, he's got body dysmorphia. It's not why he's behaving like this. It's not the cause, but he'll have been rejected for the appropriate therapy. The rest? I'm sure you got everything else. Can we stop now? I can't do any more'

He closes his eyes. And just for once the officialdom of the FBI bows out. Jack takes the laptop. Clarice gets the door whilst Brian and Jimmy return the extra chairs. Only Bev stays. She takes Will's hand. He doesn't open his eyes.

'Honey. It'll be ok. He probably knew she'd show it to you. Wanted you to show them that he's on the side of the angels, that you both are'

Will looks at her then 'it's not that Bev. He really does like her. She's attractive, smart, focussed, together. What's not to like? I always thought that if..' he trails off

'Will, baby, that's the meds, or the hospital or the shit that's talking. Hannibal loves you. Totally. So what if he likes Clarice? Good. He can work that, we all can'

Will doesn't reply, and they stay like this until he falls asleep. Tears unshed but glittering in his eyelashes.

Beverly lets his hand go carefully. She'd like to smack Hannibal, but that'd be a manipulative shitty thing to do too. Maybe he didn't know they'd show Will. Maybe he didn't know all the ways Will might read the interaction. Maybe it's his own uncertainty and fear. Maybe he's seeking reassurance. Still useful, still wanted, still desired. Oh for goodness sake. Maybe she should smack both of them.

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'Please ma'am, sir do have a seat. It's very gracious of you to meet me like this, Mischa, hello'

'Hello Freddie, thank you for choosing here. I do like it. Aunt? The afternoon tea is especially good, I'll share the cakes if you like'

The Lady Murasaki looks around the Russian tea room. It's well appointed Belle Époque styling is fitting for someone such as she and Robertus. Robertus inclines his head towards Freddie Lounds

'Ms Lounds, Hannibal tells us you have been especially supportive in your publication. Thank you. It is due to his regard and Mischa's' he nods to his niece 'encouragement that we

are willing to speak with you today'

'And I appreciate it. Thank you. How does it feel to be re-united in this way?'

Murasaki glances at Mischa 'family trouble is always collectively painful. We experience the pain in different ways, but it has the same source. We consider the source and differently work to address it, collectively'

Shit thinks Freddie, this is where Hannibal gets it from, what the fuck did that mean? Mischa smiles sweetly at her

'We all feel bad about the same thing, so we'll work together to not feel bad and sort out the cause too'

Oh. Mischa is here to translate. Well alright then. Let's have at it. Tea first though, she's going to need to stock up on some carbs to get through this.

After about ninety minutes she's used up her notebook, she's changed tape three times, and her head is reeling. Wow. Wow. She's got some amazing material. Ok some of it she will have to run by Hannibal to full understand what the fuck his aunt or uncle were talking about but fuck. Amazing.

During the 'tea' they've also polished off fifteen small cakes between them, maybe thirty quarter sandwiches and lots of little petit fours and mini savoury things. All delicious. She feels slightly stuffed. Mischa has chocolate on her ear. Her ear? Murasaki and Robertus look a trifle exhausted. She thanks them profusely.

Robertus tries to take the bill but she insists. She can expense it, probably, she glances at it. Fucking hell. She can expense some of it. Maybe fifty dollars. Last time they came here Beverly paid and Hannibal paid her back. She hadn't mentioned how much it had come to. Probably the shock.

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'Alright girlies, I thought it was time the murder besties got together'

Beverly, Freddie, Alana, Margot, and Chiyoh are sitting together in a bar in downtown Baltimore. Mischa would be here but she's had to go to some legal meeting with her aunt and uncle. And the group, well Bev and Alana couldn't agree on whether to invite Clarice or not. Not won in the end as Bev is a little pissed with her about the whole DVD business with Will.

'So. Alana and I thought, well I thought, and I persuaded Alana I was right that we've all been a bucket of sad for the few weeks. Like we've all been part of that thing the ice bucket challenge? You remember. Few years ago? Anyway. Crap. So. This week preliminary hearing. Fingers crossed! Right! Not going to say more as my esteemed colleague is testifying'

Alana ducks her head and mutters 'sorry folks'

Bev smiles at her, 'that's ok we can all spell subpoena, can't we? Freddie nice job on the interview. The pictures are outstanding. Lots of hits I hope? Ad revenue up?'

Freddie grins 'it better be, the afternoon tea cost nearly $300'

They all whistle, most of the time the Russian tea room is somewhere you stand outside and press your nose up against the window looking at the beautiful people. Alana glances around, actually right this second given that Chiyoh and Margot are here, they might just count as the beautiful people, in terms of disposable income. Even she and Bev as federal employees are doing ok. Life as a tabloid reporter might be a little tough at times. Though she's never heard Freddie complain. Though actually they barely know each other. Really.

They spend a happy couple of hours drinking, laughing, hiccuping, leering at the other patrons. Even Chiyoh smiles when a very well dressed business woman puts her card in the breast pocket of Chiyoh's jacket. Towards the end, after an evening where they all pass the Bechdel test hands down they take a moment to consider Will and Hannibal.

'Best hope? Everyone gets one minute Freddie you first, go'

'Ok? That there's a Ripper kill before the weekend, no really' everyone groans and she holds up a hand 'really, because if there is that'll clear that particular issue off the table. I know it'll be shitty for you lot. But frankly, and I baulk at frankness, I mean really why? But frankly it'd be great, a no lose for everyone involved. Yeah. Ok. Not the victim obviously.'

'Fair point. Alright no editorialising ladies. Alana you next' Bev points at her friend

'Oh. Alright. Errrm. That Will is well enough to come out of hospital but isn't well enough to testify? I want the best of all worlds. Hannibal and he will both hate it if he has to go on the stand. I mean. It's a low blow by the prosecution. And Hannibal. Ok. I see Freddie's point. I guess that'd be the best thing, even if, well, you know'

'Chiyoh?'

'I do not understand how your FBI and the prosecution can proceed. There is not enough evidence. Or it is circumstantial. I would like to see the charges dismissed as unfounded, with or without testimony. Then we may continue with life. More as normal. And I hope Will Graham will not be persuaded back to the FBI. I know he has been involved in the Martin case and in the "people soup" it seems very unfair. It does not seem like justice to me'

They all pause at this, Bev nods 'fair enough. Margot'

'Actually, what I'd like to happen is for Abigail Hobbs to turn up. Done.'

'No no, say more, say more, Abigail turning up means...'

'Well, she's not dead for one. That's one charge gone. And as far as I can see that's the main issue isn't it? I know there's the Ripper stuff but if Hobbs is discredited as a witness then we're on the road to those, well he's not been charged with them has he?'

Bev shakes her head 'he hasn't. And he can't be. Not yet. You're right, we've got nothing. So overall, in the next five days we need Abigail to show up, for the Ripper to drop someone, for Will to feel much better but to have a temporary lapse so he can't testify, but the kind of lapse where he's fine afterwards, for no new evidence to surface. Alright. Let's drink to that'

'Bev, what about you? You didn't say. What do you hope for?'

'A proper Hannibal dinner party'

They clink glasses. A worthy toast.

.....

'Will? Hey. Will? I thought I'd come and say hi. How are you?'

'Jimmy? Nice of you. Ok. Thanks. How's Frederick?'

'Alright, thanks. Bit better. Still another few weeks. He's going to have be vegetarian. Try not to laugh'

Will smiles quite broadly, gestures at a chair 'sorry, sorry, can't help it. It is kind of funny'

Jimmy smiles back 'I know. I had to not laugh too. He's pretty prickly about it'

'Glad you warned me. They've said I can go and see him. I might just do that, I think I can roll that far now'

'You know Gideon's back at the BSHCI?'

'I knew he was going. Sorry. Are they going to keep him there when Frederick gets back?'

'Who knows, Jameson won't say. I'm not pushing. Hey. About yesterday? I am very sorry. Truly. None of us thought worse of you. Or Hannibal. Clarice maybe. Jack? For sure. And don't defend them. I can see you thinking it'

Will smiles weakly at him 'you're right I was going to. It was mean wasn't it? Unkind?'

Jimmy nods 'it was. Of course you'd see stuff we didn't. I don't know what Clarice or Jack thought they'd achieve'

'I'd like to think Clarice didn't realise. She's been honest with me so far. It seems a shitty trick. All round. You know Ruth Martin came by this morning. I had to work really hard to be polite. It's not her fault.'

'She's at the lab now. I'm afraid I ducked it, I'm still too pissed with Jack. I left it to Brian and Bev. Hey, here's fun news, Bev went out with Alana and the girlz last night. They all got rat arsed. She's so hungover today. Apparently when Chiyoh has drunk too much she sings karaoke'

'Is there a karaoke bar in Baltimore, there's one in Washington, but here?'

'Nope. She just got up and started singing along to the music in the bar. There was a live band doing covers. I think Alana and Bev taped some of it. But Bev, she's laughing so hard it's really shaky. Makes it funnier. I'll see if I can find it' Jimmy gets out his cell and starts searching 'here'

It is as funny as Jimmy said Chiyoh singing Paloma Faith 'only love can hurt like this' and he can hear everyone laughing very hard. The phone clearly shaking.

'It's good. Thanks Jimmy. Haven't laughed much. The last few days. Week.'

He still hasn't told anyone he saw Hannibal. Even if Clarice or Jack were trying to manipulate him, he's keeping quiet. Just in case.

'You'll be out soon. Won't you?'

'Lovely Jimmy. I hope so. Just keep Kade Prurnell away and I'll be ok. You know I've been compelled to testify? At least Brian will be there too. Are you going to be here with Frederick, they mentioned a video link'

'We've not discussed it. I don't know what he's going to say. I think it should be Jameson testifying. After all Frederick hadn't actually been in role all the time Hannibal's been in the BSHCI. It seems crazy. But he's the director. So he's called. Stupid. What can he say? Except personal opinion based on professional and personal contact. It's irritating the fuck out of me. Sorry.'

Will raises his eyebrows, Jimmy doesn't often swear like this.

'Let's think about something else.Tell me about "people soup" how's that going?'

.....

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

The Silence of the Lambs part 3? I think. And more Kaiseki.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

'Bitch, bitch, you fucking bitch!!'

'I don't give a fuck what you call me' Catherine Martin screamed up the pit 'I'm gonna break this little bastard's neck, you get me a phone right now, right now'

She squeezed the little dog a bit harder than she meant and the dog let out a piteous whine. She could see the man at the mouth of the pit was furious. She pulled the little dog close and dragged the mattress over her. He wouldn't risk a shot if he might hit the little dog.

Fuck yeah for the plan! The bucket, a bone, twenty feet or so of cotton strips, all tied together, and the little dogs greed. Fuck yeah. She was exhausted. She petted the little dog and held it close. Fuck yeah. Knackered now. He knew she meant business now.

.....

Senator Ruth Martin walked away determinedly from the BSHCI. Her interview with Hannibal Lecter had been satisfactory. Agent Krendler from the FBI was rushing along beside her.

'So, Senator, we're happy with the information we've got from Lecter. This Benjamin Raspaill fellow? We're getting a warrant for Lecter's patient notes. So we can retrieve them'

The Senator stopped and turned and stared at him

'What do you mean a warrant. Get Lecter in there, he can read his own damn notes and just tell us'

'But senator.. I mean. It will be difficult. It will mean'

He stopped, the Senator looked at him as though he'd lost his mind

'Agent Krendler, you haven't totally pissed me off. Yet. Don't be obtuse. Get to it. Now'

Paul Krendler backs up and turns and practically runs back to the front entrance. He drags his cell out. Shit. This won't win him friends higher up. Ok, first call

'Agent Starling? Senator Martin wants Lecter to get his notes, I'm going to call Jack Crawford, get some back up, you ok to clear it with the OIG? Great thanks'

He switched off the cell, into the director's office, currently occupied by Clark Jameson

'Agent Krendler? I thought you'd gone? What's the matter?'

'The senator wants Lecter. At his office. Or house. Where ever he keeps his fucking old case notes. We're getting the ok from the OIG and the federal court. Better get ready.'

'This is very unorthodox, we can't just send him out'

'Do what you've got to do. We've got back up coming.'

Down in the basement Hannibal is sitting looking over the drawings Clarice had brought with her yesterday. From his study. Mischa had collected them together and given them to Agent Starling when she brought a note from him. He recognises it as something of a bribe. And also a message. Quid pro quo Clarice, he thinks. Quid pro quo.

If she's smart she will have shown the recordings to Will. Almost certainly Will will be pissed about it. The drawings, the food, the evening exchange of secrets. The careful elucidation of ideas. He'll surpass himself, will be creative and demonstrate the extraordinary abilities of his mind. If she shows him. If she doesn't, well then Benjamin Raspail will be useful too. Hannibal can remember most of the detail, but his notes will be clearer. Now it just takes Senator Martin to get her act together.

Nice suit, thinks Hannibal. Nice woman. Used to getting her own way. But then don't we all want our own way? At least some of the time. If he knew the name of the man responsible he'd tell her. As it is they'll just have to work together a little longer. He keeps his expression blank. They'll either get a warrant, but, if they're smart, if Senator Martin is smart they'll get him. Tick tock, tick tock.

He grimaces. Prison. What is it good for? All that's happened is that he's felt increasingly alienated from those around him, and frustrated, angered, seeking release in gamesmanship. Not edifying at all. He thinks about Catherine Martin. Resolves to work harder. Now if they'd only tell him what Will said? Maybe the Senator? Or maybe...

.....

The door to Will's hospital room bangs open and he can hear a number of people come in. Oh for fucks sake? More? Will really doesn't want to open his eyes. Yesterday was shit, so was the day before. Today is marginally better. So far. Nice of Jimmy. The Senator was ok. Not her fault. Her poor kid. Go away. Just. Go away.

He opens his eyes and pulls himself up in bed, keeping his gaze fixed on his blanket covered legs. He swallows miserably, he might not have Hannibal's fantastic sense of smell but that's the Senator's perfume and some other less pleasant scents too. What now?

Will glances up, 'shit! What the fuck? Take that off that's dreadful!'

Jack Crawford steps up to the muzzle buckled over Hannibal's face and undoes it. 'It's mandatory for the transport of inmates'

Will just stares at him 'Jack, I'm sorry but please go away. I can't even look at you right now'

Jack looks like he might argue but instead nods and gets out. Will tries very hard not to lose it

'Hannibal?'

'Will.'

Will shakes his head, looks at the Senator and then at Agent Starling 'don't think for a moment Clarice that I'm not pissed as hell about this. Senator? Not your fault, even if it's your doing. What's the deal here?'

'Dr Lecter has some notes on a patient he had referred to him a number of years ago. He never saw the patient just a referral. We're all hoping that between you, you might be able to guide our next steps'

'Hannibal? Did Agent Starling talk you through what I said?'

Hannibal nods. Clarice has made good use of the time between the BSHCI, his office and finally Will's hospital room. It hadn't taken much at all to shift her towards bringing him here. Now though he can see Will could go either way, be furiously and incandescently angry which would be a sight to behold even if it might trigger another episode, or could work his way through to some kind of answer. Although angry Will is beautiful, angry ill Will is not. His FBI colleagues have pushed him too far already.

'Alright then. What else? Can you take the fucking straightjacket off?'

Clarice looks nervous then,

'Oh alright. For goodness sake. Hannibal talk me through the notes, have you got them? Where are my glasses?'

Senator Martin passes him the ruled bound set of notes. Clarice passes him his glasses. Hannibal watches Will, he's still bound in a straitjacket fixed upright to a porters trolley. But he's here. And he can see Will properly. This has worked out rather well. Though it's taken a week from inception to realisation. Clarice is not as fast as she thinks, or as Hannibal hoped. He's aware that he might be radiating a little too much pleasedness when Will looks up at him and narrows his eyes. It's his 'reckoning' face. Dear Will. Now Will's mind is like lightening. Such a joy. He's got it now.

Just for a second Will wonders if Hannibal is thinking of escaping. He better not be. That would be beyond stupid. Ok. How to get that across? Without alerting the others. Especially Agent Krendler who looks trigger happy. Oh. Oh? That's not it. Well isn't he a sap? Hello Hannibal. It's lovely to see you too. Still working the whole prison dress thing? Nice, sexy, we still haven't agreed about the bondage yet you know? Better bring that nice straightjacket home with you hadn't you?

Will slightly flushes, Hannibal actually smiles 'darling Will'.

.....

Jack Crawford waits outside Will's room, idling through his cell. Brother Elk is sitting opposite him, saying nothing. Jack knows he's got something to do with the whole animal thing but he's been told this guy doesn't really speak. What would he say if he did? He's pretty devoted to Will. Well shit.

Sure Jack knows Will isn't being treated well. Ok. He's not treating Will especially well. But there's the girl, and the Shrike stuff, and the Ripper, and the people soup, stupid name, Jack smirks to himself. Really? Stupid name. Yeah so, people soup, and that thing with the Leeds' and that other family. And now Wells is claiming he had help. For fucks sake. And this hearing coming up. God. His job is thankless. And Bella? He steers away from that thought. Fast.

'You are the man who has to see it all'

Jack looks at the guy 'it's the job. It's what I do'

'Is it who you are though? Is it who you want to be? Ain't just being, better than doing sometimes? We all just have too much of doing? Wouldn't you say?'

Jack shifts 'sometimes. But even if I stop doing, other people don't'

'True story. Lots of people doing shit right here. I see it'

'What do you see?'

'The girl? She rains fire. Her cousin? He just summons it. He ain't so bad. Not really. Misguided. He's a follower. She is the queen.'

'Do you mean Abigail Hobbs? Do you know where she is?'

'Oh the girl ain't the queen. Maybe wants to be. In charge of her own hive. They all come a buzzin to her, little workers'

'Are you saying there's someone else?'

'I thought you saw?'

'I thought so too? Who else?'

'Oh I can't tell. You have to know it, here' he strikes one hand against his breast, over his heart. 'That's the only way. Don't you feel it? Will did. Got his head all lit up. Beautiful ain't it? To be consumed by knowing? I can't tell you no more. I don't know it all. You feel it? You come right up and say'

Jack looks at him, the guy seems to have gone back into some half sleep. Just waiting. Just once Jack thinks, just once I'd like an ordinary car-jacking, or a drugs bust, or some shit like that. You know? Simple police stuff.

.....

Roland Umber wants to scream. Really scream. He's having to tear himself out of whatever the hell this hell is. Limb by limb, joint by joint. And fuck it hurts, hurts damn you. When he's just about extracted himself. Fuck. He looks around. Now he really wants to scream. Bodies. Lots of bodies. Sewn together. There's a door to the, what is this place? ok a door. Out? There's no lock just a handle. Ok. Ok. He realises the noise he can hear isn't his own heart beating the hell out of his chest. Someone else. Oh. Fuck. Climbing? The outside? Shit shit shit. He better get out now. Fuck, the door is open open open. He glances back as he stumbles outdoors, a fucking grain silo.

He runs, as best he can. Into the corn.

.....

Clarice sits on the FBI jet. This is as good as it gets, Agent in the Field leading on a case, high profile. Gets the jet. Off to Fredericka Bummel's home. The first victim, found third. She just needs a connection, someone she knew, worked with, something to do with sewing, clothing, home crafts, tailor. Something. Will had some amazing ideas. Incredible insight. As though he knew. That plus the bug from the fourth girl? Catherine Martin? You might get to come on home. Maybe the lambs will stop screaming after all. Forty minutes out. Maybe just twenty winks?

.....

'He did, it's a colour palatte. You know. That's how he's choosing them. Filling in his colour palatte'

'Well for goodness sake! How'd he get that?'

'We ask that every time, every time. He just looks' Jimmy smiles at Brian

'Amazing. Really. Ok. So what next?'

'Hannibal suggested we look in the glaze, the resin stuff. There might be material in it, the crackleure? Worth a try. Got to be? Right? Pollen and stuff?'

Brian smiles at his friend 'you just like pollen don't you?'

Jimmy smiles sweetly back 'you know I do'.

Bev sticks her head round the door.

'Guys, fucking hell, fucking hell! Clarice! She got him, she shot the bastard. The Martin girl is safe'

.....

In the BSHCI the deputy director comes down to the basement. He doesn't like it down here, but he's a responsible man. And he can be the bearer of good tidings as well as bad.

'Dr Lecter? They found the Martin girl'

Hannibal stands up from behind his table 'alive?'

'Yes. Alive. Senator Martin says thank you. She was very gracious'

Hannibal nods, sits back down and goes back to his drawing. Will lying asleep, not quite at peace.

.....

That evening Beau Graham is on a flight to Baltimore. Bev has kept him pretty well up to date. He's come back for the preliminary hearing. Three days to go. Will should have come out yesterday. But the doctor wasn't happy. Again. Coming home tomorrow now. Beau knows Will wants to be at Wolf Trap. But he might have to do the family rounds first. At least look in at Hannibal's place. He's been told he can't visit Hannibal.

Beau blows out his cheeks. A year ago if anyone had asked him about the workings of the federal government or judiciary he'd have been politely disinterested. Not it's almost all he thinks about in his down time. The one good thing? The Martin girl. Oh and Bev, Bev is always a good thing. Hopefully she'll be at the airport. Though there's a party tonight, for Agent Starling. Well. She deserves it. But, thinks Beau with gritted teeth so do Hannibal and Will. They really deserve it.

The air hostess comes round, collects the last of the empties. Smiles at Beau. He smiles back. Nice people on this service. Friendly. Ten minutes to go.....

.....

'Beau! Beau! Hey babe' Beverly flings her arms round his neck and kisses him like there is no tomorrow, she surely is a wonderful thing. He slings his arm round her and shoulders his carry on

'Ok then, Will? And then party?'

'Sure. Definitely Will first. He's a bit fed up. It's been a bit of a week. He thinks Hannibal did this long con on Clarice to get her to let Hannibal see him at the hospital. He's a bit grumpy about it'

'For why?'

'Because he didn't see it straight away. He thought Hannibal was getting all dreamy over the lovely Agent Starling.'

Beau laughs 'oh, I can imagine he was pissed at the thought'

'He was. Really and truly. But I think more annoyed with himself after. He says his brain isn't working like it used to. He thinks he's got rusty or something. Little bit of a sulk. Thanks Hannibal showed him up, or he let him down, or he's not good enough or something'

'My blessed boy. Come on then. Let's go and annoy him some more.'

.....

'Hey, dad, hey. Nice one'

'And you too. Getting you out tomorrow. Not a moment too soon either. You look like you're as bored as a federal committee. Sorry. Maybe not the best example'

Will smiles 'no. Good enough. I'm so looking forwards to being out. Even if it's only to go to this fucking hearing. I really hate them dad. Really'

'You got the girl out'

'Yeah. I know. That's the good bit. I'm glad about that.'

'Honey. All these things are balanced, rough and smooth, good and bad, it's not an either or, you get some of one and it tips in that direction. It can go either way'

'I know dad. It's just. A bit' the tears that have been threatening the last few days start to slide down his face, Beau sits himself closer in the bed and pulls his son into a warm hug. Doesn't try to stop him just lets him cry quietly. Bev sits down in one of the chairs and just waits them out.

They're still there a couple of hours later, Will considerably cheerier. There's a knock on the door

'Clarice? Wow I didn't expect to see you, they'll miss you at your own party'

'I came to say thank you. You and Dr Lecter. You saved her. I was just the feet on the ground. Congratulations. Senator Martin makes a powerful ally too. I know it wasn't for her. But she does. I'll see you at the hearing'

She smiles and nods at Beau and Bev, at the door she looks back 'tell Dr Lecter nicely played

Chapter End Notes

Sass to be resumed soon...

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

> When I switched from series to multi chapter 29 people had read the next two chapters! I'm so sorry if you got all excited there was new stuff. I'm just getting ready to begin posting chapters and I wanted to keep it as chapters and not a series. Sorry. Sorry. Xxx

Senator Martin. First of all congratulations. I'm Freddie Lounds. Your people said you'd have a few minutes today? Is this Catherine? Catherine, hi, hi. I'm so pleased. We're all pleased'

Freddie holds out her hand and somehow after they shake, the Senator is left holding Freddie's business card.

'Ms Lounds I'm sure you understand. We just want time together'

'Of course, of course. You know I'm friends with Hannibal and Will?'

The Senator pauses then and looks at Freddie. She glances at the card, then her watch. They've got thirty minutes before the flight, she can give her fifteen. Catherine too. A good news story.

'Alright. Over there, in that cafe. I'm sure you'd welcome a coffee?'

Freddie smiles 'always thirsty work waiting for a flight. Catherine let me get you a muffin or something. Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham? They were the ones who did the analysis on Jame Gumb. Basically they found you'

Catherine Martin looks at her 'yeah? Really? What about Agent Starling?'

'Clarice? Vital I'd say. Given Will is in Hospital with encephalitis and Hannibal is incarcerated waiting for a preliminary hearing in a case where frankly there's no evidence at all'

'Mom? You know about this. These guys?'

'Darling I saw both Dr Lecter and Dr Graham. He is recovering from encephalitis, I believe he might be well enough to go home this week. Dr Lecter has got himself tied up in some legal knots. He's got a preliminary hearing this week. I'm told the case is very weak'

Catherine nibbles on a hang nail, Freddie wants to bat her hands away from her mouth. She resists.

'Ok. Mom. But you know. Like if there's something you can do? I dunno what. Ms Lunds, sorry'

Catherine looks at the card her mother has placed on the table between them

'Ms Lounds, what can mom do, or me, you know my god father, maybe he'd put in a word with the judge or something, mom?'

Her mother looks at her speculatively. This hadn't occurred to the Senator. But maybe? Couldn't hurt could it? A word in the right place. Of the right kind.

Freddie looks at her 'who's your godfather?'

Catherine smiles 'the vice-president'

.....

Beau carefully walks Will into the house in Wolf Trap. Will feels ok, just worn out from lying around too much. His body mostly feels like his again, but not quite yet. The house smells of dust, dogs, engine oil, and the memory of laughter.

'It's alright dad, I think I can manage. I'm going to sit, there. Will you make some coffee?'

'Sure. Bev told me Alana dropped some basics by. I'm hoping that included milk. You and she made up then?'

'Ok. Tell you what I'll come through to the kitchen. It's probably warmer there. I'll put the space heater on in here. We can lounge around later. You've got no plans right?'

Will makes it into the kitchen behind his dad. He uses various pieces of furniture to cling to, to keep himself upright. In the kitchen he pulls himself onto a stool next to the counter that separates the cooking area from the eating area.

Beau checks the cupboards. Plenty of staples, packets and jars half used. New unopened things too, some duplicates, as though the person shopping hadn't been sure what was missing and didn't want to take any chances. In the refrigerator there's milk and other dairy. Some bacon, some minced beef or lamb.

'Looks like Alana did a good job'

'Yeah? That's nice of her. We did make up. Mostly, I think. She came and apologised. She went to see Hannibal too. She's got to testify as well. I think that probably helped her focus'

Beau smiles as he spoons coffee into the French press 'what? The shit finally got real?'

'Something like that. Have you checked the tin, are there any biscuits or cookies?'

Beau loosens the lid and passes it over, half a packet of ginger thins. Still seem edible. Enough. Hannibal would scold him. But Hannibal's not here. He'd rather have Hannibal than stale ginger biscuits, but it is what it is.

'Have you thought about what you'll say on the stand?'

'Everything totally up front. As honest as I know to be. Prosecution guy came by. I think he got the message that I'm a hostile witness, or at least a really really pissed off witness. But I said I'd not make it harder. I can't imagine it would go well for Hannibal if I was evasive or difficult. Is that a car? Outside?'

Beau pours boiling water into the French press 'I'll go see, you plunge this when it's ready ok. Anyone you don't want to see? Apart from Jack or Paul Krendler? Or the OIG woman?'

'Not off the top of my head'

Beau nods and smiles at his son and goes back through to the front of the house. He pulls open the screen door

'Freddie, well alrighty, how are you? Come in. We're about to have coffee. You've got fruit. Nicely done'

Freddie grins at him and hands over the woven basket of fruit 'Mr Graham. Good to see you. How's Will doing?'

From the back of the house Will shouts 'I'm alright, come on in here. I've had enough moving around to last me the day'

Beau smiles at Freddie as they walk through to the back of the house and the kitchen

'He's walked from the hospital to the car, and the car to the kitchen. He might not manage any more. He's a bit tired'

'I heard that. Wow is that fruit. Freddie, hey, you don't have to bring fruit every time'

'Actually I tried to get it to Hannibal, but they wouldn't let me. I don't know. Maybe they thought I'd poisoned it or something'

Beau and Will smile at her, laugh a little, 'it'd be great headlines Freddie'

Freddie smiles very very broadly 'headlines? Well, about that!'

.....

Clarice looks at her thumbs and twiddles them again. She's been waiting for fifteen minutes now. Jack Crawford and Kade Prurnell have been in with the judge without her. So she's just waiting. Not quite patiently, more, a kind of limbo. There's nothing to look at in the corridor, she's just glad there are a few chairs to sit on. Makes her realise that people have to wait to see the judge so often they've put out chairs.

Five minutes later a clerk puts his head round the door

'Agent Starling? Could you come in now?'

Clarice gets up and shoulders her bag. Follows the clerk through an outer office into the judge's room. Kade and Jack sit opposite the Judge across a wide plane of mahogany desk. There's a third chair which she takes.

'Agent Starling. I'll get right to it. I've asked the three of you here today to talk about the Lecter hearing. I understand you've just come off the Martin case?' Clarice nods 'good for you. Nice to have a happy ending for once. So, the Lecter hearing. Agent Crawford and Ms Prurnell have talked me through the evidence to date. I want your take. Preferably briefly' he glances at Kade Prurnell as he says it, maybe she couldn't stop talking.

'Ok. Sir. I think the only charges we might even begin to have a chance of getting to court are to do with the Hobbs girl disappearing. But that looks tight and having seen what we've got so far, I believe a jury would baulk at it. Everything else, Shrike girls, the two other girls? All that's out the window. Rightly so.'

'And the Ripper?'

'I'd say we've got nothing'

'Would you?'

Clarice says nothing just nods.

The judge taps his pen against the blotter on his desk.

'Senator Martin got in touch. How useful was the doctor would you say in getting the girl out?'

'Essential. Him and Will Graham from the BAU?'

'Ah yes. Dr Graham. The Senator mentioned him as well. I understand from Agent Crawford that they're a couple?'

'Sir'

'Alright then. Will you wait outside, you too Agent Crawford?'

The two federal agents gather themselves together and the clerk from the outer office opens the door for them, summoned by some button the judge must have pressed. Out in the hallway Jack and Clarice make use of the chairs again.

Jack kicks off with 'you know who also called Judge Davies?'

Clarice turns in her chair and looks at him 'no. Who?'

Jack smiles 'you'll love this'

.....

In the autopsy room Beverly and Brian are processing the glaze on the final body. They've both got menthol gel rubbed under their noses to try and help with the smell. Will had been right eau de people soup is not great. Bev's cell vibrates in her pocket.

'Shit. I better get that, Beau was collecting Will this morning.' She strips off her nitrile gloves and throws them into the medical waste disposal bin. Bleh. She fishes under her lab coat and pulls out her cell. Yup it was Beau, she calls him back.

Brian watches her as she nods and smiles and smiles some more.

'Alright babe, I'll see you later. Brian, oh my god. Where's Jimmy? Come with me, where is he? In the tech room'

Bev pulls Brian behind her out of the autopsy room, through the lab into the tech room. Jimmy is busy with some pollen analysis. He does like the fundamentals of investigation.

'This is amazing I've got six types of pollen off... what? Pollen's interesting. What's happened?'

'Ok guys. So. Hannibal and Will basically saved the Martin girl?' Brian and Jimmy both nod,

'Guess who her godfather is, and guess who that godfather phoned this morning, and guess who is being given an unconditional discharge, and guess who is going to be out of the fucking BSHCI tomorrow?'

Jimmy smiles 'this is just like Brian's jeopardy thing. Don't worry Bev, it was just an idea we had. I only hope I know the answer to the last one. Really? Because that's amazing. What happened?'

Beverly grins 'ok, now as far as Beau knows this is what happened. He got it from Freddie Lounds and then verified by Clarice, who really was phoning to tell Will. They're dropping the case. Not enough to take forwards. It doesn't mean he's totally out of the woods yet. But the judge has signed off on his release. And guess what, or rather who tipped the scales of justice in the right direction?'

.....

Hannibal sits quietly at his table in the basement of the BSHCI. He's eating lunch. Matthew Brown delivered it twenty minutes ago and had been uncharacteristically quiet. Nevertheless Hannibal hadn't riled him. Had actually enquired if he was alright

'What? Yeah. I'm fine doc. Thanks for asking. It's just. Nah. I better not say. Look, you've been alright to me. I'm sorry about all the shit. Really. I apologise. I'm an idiot sometimes. This is meatloaf I think, tomatoes and mash with it. Do you want all of it?'

'Thank you Mr Brown. Apology accepted. I hope you continue well, and yes all three things please'

Matthew had looked at him then, slightly miserable, still slightly truculent. Hard to say which was winning out. He'd ladled the food out and smiled a bit and wheeled the trolley back up

the corridor. The empty meal tray is sitting in the food hatch waiting for either Matthew or one of the other orderlies to come and collect it.

.....

'Hello Will! I wasn't really sure you'd be well enough to come and visit. It's lovely to see you. Hello Beau, you too. Aunt is in the sitting room, would you like to come in?,

'Mischa, sweetheart. Is your uncle around? We need him too?'

Will and Beau both hug Mischa, she looks delighted to see them, especially that Will is out of hospital.

'Yes alright. He's having a little rest, I can go and get him if you'd like. Aunt? Will and Beau are here. I'm just going to get uncle'

Will and Beau smile as Murasaki rises from the sofa to greet them both. She is as friendly and gracious as ever. Chiyoh offers tea but they suggest that she waits. Mischa and Robertus appear a few minutes later. He's wearing a rather lovely satin smoking jacket.

'William, how very nice to see you. This is unexpected. No, no, don't get up. I thought you'd need longer. How may we be of help?'

Will smiles very happily

'Just for once I bring only good news. All the charges are being dropped, Hannibal's going to be released tomorrow morning'

There's a moment of silence and then much gladness and tears too. Everyone hugs each other, there are questions and explanations and some gaps in what Will and Beau know, but that doesn't matter. Eventually Robertus asks

'Has anyone told Hannibal yet?'

Will is currently hugging Mischa and they are both crying so Beau answers

'Agent Starling is seeing him this evening, Will's allowed to go too, we thought he could take some clothes for Hannibal if we may? We've got a number of options to go through concerning tomorrow. Would that be alright?

.....

Abel Gideon and Hannibal Lecter are in adjacent cells. This afternoon they are engaged in a game of chess. Perhaps not surprisingly given their academic pasts they are both consummate players. Who ever Gideon may or may not be chess is not something he has lost his capacity for.

'Do you know what the fuss is all about Hannibal? There's something afoot for sure. Any of your pets tell you?'

Hannibal smiles faintly to himself 'no. For once I have been limited in the efficacy of my persuasive abilities, but you are correct, there is something happening. Perhaps a transfer?'

He raises his voice, just occasionally the person in the very end cell nearest the door and the guard station overhears things when the door is open 'Mr Wells. any news?'

The end cell is occupied by Lawrence Wells. Hannibal has refrained from alerting him to the fact that it was his partner who identified him.'

'Not a thing Dr Lecter. Not a thing. Something though?'

'Gideon, I'm sorry. I believe we shall have to wait for the information to filter down to us. Maybe the orderlies when they collect the supper trays will have some news'

The two men continue their game and unusually they finish at a stalemate

'I'm going to take a little break Hannibal. Think about those last few moves. Ponder some. You know'

'Of course' Hannibal goes back to reading, after the first few days whilst they'd withheld reading material Hannibal has been able to read from a limited but interesting collection in the BSHCI library. They mostly seem to be retired books from the City's libraries, with annotation and remarks in the margins. Fascinating. The entrance buzzer sounds, and one of the orderlies, Barney comes along the corridor. He's unaccompanied, which is unusual.

'Dr Lecter. Hello. I have to use these cuffs, but that's all. In front please'

Hannibal holds out his hands through the slot in the bars usually used for mail but sometimes used if inmates only require cuffing and not more complex restraints. This too is unusual.

When Barney opens the cell door Hannibal walks along side him to the corridor exit. Several of the other inmates have stood up to watch him depart. Barney is smiling. But makes no comment.

At one of the visitor rooms Barney knocks, opens the door and ushers Hannibal in, ahead of him. In the room is Hannibal's lawyer Charles Rolls, Carl Jameson the Deputy Director of the BSHCI, Agent Starling and Beau Graham. At first Will is hidden behind the four of them as he's sitting. Really his legs won't hold him up for any longer. It's a miracle really that he's got this far. Jameson takes the keys from Barney and undoes the handcuffs.

'Dr Lecter, the paperwork won't come through until tomorrow, but at 10am you'll be released. The charges are being dropped. Jeopardy isn't attached so I can't promise we won't see you again. But, well, congratulations. You are very nearly a free man'

Hannibal nods, blinks and then laughs. There is general delight and eventually the small group leaves so that Will and Hannibal may speak to one another.

Hannibal pulls up a chair and sets it alongside Will's. He carefully pulls Will into an embrace

'You should probably be at home with your feet up'

'Yeah. Probably. You too'

'I will be. Tomorrow'

'Tomorrow then. We can thank Freddie Lounds for this'

Hannibal pushes his nose through Will's hair and presses a kiss just behind the corner of Will's jaw

'Hey, tickles'

'Freddie you say? Really?'

'Yup. I'll tell you all about it. Oh and we've promised her an exclusive. Seemed like the least we could do really'

'I concur. What else have we planned?'

Hannibal makes just the slightest of emphasis on the word "we"

Will grins and kisses him. What starts as something light and sweet becomes heated quickly. Will pulls away

'God. Some of that for sure. Ok. So I only found out four hours ago. I've seen Donald and got various boring health things signed off. I went to Baltimore. They're all a lot delighted. Everyone sends love. You'll see them tomorrow late afternoon I think. It depends what you'd like. There's an a la carte menu of choices. Main thing is there's a lunch the day after tomorrow, for everyone, to say thank you. Bev's in charge, well, she and Beau. I'm leaving them to it. Dad also went to the furniture place whilst I was with Donald, they're delivering a new sofa and bed tomorrow morning! I ordered it weeks ago, but, well, you know.

Right sorry, where was I? We're going off straight after lunch. I'm very sorry but I had to cancel Venice. I had to give them notice and it looked too unlikely. And, well I didn't exactly cancel it, I just, well I'll talk you through my decision. So hopefully you'll still be talking to me after I tell you! But Chiyoh is letting us have the cabin if you'd like that?'

'My darling Will, I think I will like anything if it involves you and no prison jump suits, and something that is actually food'

'I've missed you so much'

.....

Bella Crawford is lying in their bed in the front bedroom of their house. From the window she can see trees, just now beginning to think about coming into leaf. She can just see the road that their house sits on. She hopes she'll see the spring properly but that's not clear yet. Jack had been talking about Italy. But the current case load has made that less likely.

She hears the front door go, and then the sound of Jack opening the hall closet putting away his coat and scarf, kicking off his shoes and putting on slippers. It's a whole liturgy of sound

she knows well. She hears him begin the ascent up the stairs.

'My sweet Bella. You're awake. I'm surprised'

'Got a bit bored, thought I'd try a book or too. Short stories. Will gave them to me. Nice of him to think of it'

'Something else Will's thought of' Jack hands Bella a foolscap envelope, she frowns slightly and opens it, inside are hotel reservations for Venice and Florence and airline tickets.

'What are these?'

'Will and Hannibal were supposed to go to Italy. But the case? Well. Will had to decide three days ago or forfeit the tickets and all. He thought they wouldn't make it, and he wasn't sure the insurance would cover Hannibal, in the circumstances. He's given them to us, well to you actually, he's mighty pissed with me. But he didn't want you to miss out just because I was, and I quote 'a total shit bag'. So here we are. Italy. In two weeks time.'

Bella looks at him with tears in her eyes 'but how can we go knowing that Hannibal is being charged? Won't the caseload be too busy?'

Jack sits down on the edge of the bed 'my lovely Bella, that's the other bit of good news'.

.....

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

NSFW or the person next to you on the bus...

Will sits waiting beside the car. His car, not the Bentley. He's double checked with Donald that he is ok to drive and it means he has come alone to collect Hannibal. Agent Starling said 10am and it is a quarter to ten. He makes himself not look at his watch. He paces his breathing. In the car two bags are packed. If Hannibal wants to they could go to Wolf Trap, or to Baltimore, or drive straight to Chiyoh's cabin. Or any combination of the three.

Will takes deep careful breaths. All of this has been negotiated with family and friends. If Hannibal wants the cabin then the rest of the family will arrive in four days time. If he wants Baltimore then they'll be straight into family stuff but can escape afterwards. Will is endeavouring to sit light to it. Whatever Hannibal wants. There are a few press folk in the car park but so far they've either ignored him or not realised who he is. He doesn't recognise any of them. Not locals.

Freddie is waiting for a call to find out where she is going to meet them. An exclusive which she is already salivating over. Hannibal had laughed when Will told him that she'd actually been nervous about asking. She's been enormously helpful. With Mischa, with tracking down reluctant witnesses for the timeline, with the Senator. Especially with the Senator. She deserves her exclusive.

Carl Jameson the Deputy Director of the BSHCI comes out onto the front steps of the hospital and the journalists move towards him. This too has been agreed. Frederick will be pissed he's missed out on this. But there we go. He's still in hospital. Agent Starling is beside Jameson and together they hold the attention of the small crowd. Will watches the side of the building. Hannibal comes round the corner, hands deep in the pockets of a dark navy pea coat, one of Rust's which was suitably plain and non glamorous. When Hannibal sees Will he walks purposefully across the tarmac of the car park. Will waits for him.

When Hannibal reaches him they embrace quietly, Will kisses him gently and then holds the door of the car open. Hannibal gets in, puts on the seat belt. And lets his head drift back to the headrest, closing his eyes.

'Do you know where you'd like to go?'

'I think Wolf Trap and then the cabin. Did you bring a bag?'

'Yes. Yours has everything on your list. When we get to Wolf Trap I'll call Freddie, and you can speak with Robertus and Murasaki, and Mischa. Chiyoh will bring them later this

evening. For a light supper. Nothing too major'

'Good. Will we drive up tomorrow?'

'That's the plan, lunch here with the team, and then we go in the afternoon. Indigo has opened the cabin up. I've spoken to Tonio and Julia, they've shopped.'

'Are there provisions at Wolf Trap?'

'Staples. I thought you actually might like to shop later this afternoon. Get into the swing of it?'

'Thank you, yes. Will..'

'It's ok. Take your time. We've got time'

'How are you feeling?'

'Ok. Strict instructions from Donald'

'Oh?'

'To enjoy you being home and safe'

Hannibal smiles 'advice we would do well to take'

'Yeah. I'm planning on it'

'It's very good to be outside'

Will glances over at him, Hannibal looks tired and grey from being indoors without natural light for too many weeks. Will hopes that the next fourteen days might give him, both of them some time to recover in a number of ways.

'I love you Hannibal'

'Thank you Will. And I you. Utterly'

'Good. It'll feel realer soon. There's seven dogs at Wolf Trap waiting to slobber on you in delight'

Hannibal laughs 'I am almost looking forwards to it'

.....

Tattlecrime Exclusive
Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham talk about life, liberty and the shadow of the Ripper.

Alana hands the tablet to Margot 'it's good. They come across as very sympathetic and credible. Hannibal does look awfully tired. Will looks ok. It's a good picture of the dogs too!'

Margot looks at the pictures and the full page article 'good bit from Starling and even Jameson making nice'

'I know. I saw Freddie got a bit from Chilton too, I do think Jimmy is good for him. Will you come to the lunch tomorrow?'

'Will they mind? They don't really know me'

'I think given the number of people who will be there it will be fine. I did ask Will. Just so that you could, if you wanted'

'In that case of course. I am pleased. For the Martins too. Are they going to be there?'

'I'm not sure. Will just shrugged when I asked. The Senator is trying to set up some kind of award or something, for both of them and Clarice'

Margot smiles 'I can't see that really being Will's style. Clarice maybe, if she's ambitious. Don't bite the hand that gives you the shiny things' she says it with just a hint of bathos. 'What about Hannibal?'

'I don't know. It's had quite an impact on him'

'Do you think he'll ever be quite clear of it?'

'I'm not sure. He's taking three months off. A couple of his patients are coming to me, three are staying with Bedelia. The rest are all going to Franks or Lemming'

'I'd hate to be Dr Lemming'

'Because of the name?'

'Yeah. Ridiculous I know. Do we need to take something tomorrow?'

'We could take some wine, or some nice edible. Probably better to be ingredients rather than something finished, so Hannibal can cook with it'

'Ok. Nice idea. Let's get him a hamper'

Alana smiles widely 'that's a very sweet idea. What a clever woman you are'

.....

Robertus, Murasaki, Mischa, Chiyoh, Hannibal and Will are seated round the table in the living room at Will's house in Wolf Trap. There's a new couch, and upstairs a new bed with a fantastic mattress. Will had ordered them the day he came out of hospital, the last time, they finally got delivered today. Genghis Khan, the old pull out has already gone to Beverly. She's passed on Vlad the Impaler to one of the interns.

This is the first time they have all sat down together. Ever. It's a gentle humorous careful evening. Trying not to exhaust Hannibal or overtax Will. When they finish eating Will goes

to make coffee for everyone. He comes back a few minutes later and hands his cell to Hannibal 'it's dad'

Hannibal smiles and excuses himself from the table. Normally this isn't something he'd do, but tonight is a little different

'Beau? Hello. Yes. Thank you. As am I. Of course. He seems alright. I believe so. Tomorrow afternoon. Next week? I'll ask. Beverly too? I understand. Yes of course. They're here now. Yes. It is quite that. I shall. Beau, thank you again. Yes, it does now. There's washing up! Thank you. For everything. See you tomorrow'

He follows Will into the kitchen and returns the cell. Hannibal leans against Will as he plunges the coffee.

'Beau asks if he might come to the cabin at the end of next week, for two nights. Beverly will join us for one or both of those nights too'

'How would that be for you? You don't even have to decide right this second do you?'

'I don't. It's true. At present there are no deadlines and no pressures. It is a strange feeling. I have got out of the habit of space'

.....

Late that night Will looks down at Hannibal now asleep. The new bed is spectacularly comfortable and in just a few minutes Will is planning on stretching out in a star shape and sleeping some kind of righteous sleep.

The last time he and Hannibal slept here in Wolf Trap was the night Georgia Madschen hid under the old pull out bed. Tonight though? They've had some of the most quiet, intense and focussed sex of their relationship.

When the family had finally left and they'd been able to just be with each other. Both of them had been quietly ecstatic to finally be together again. Will not ill, Hannibal not incarcerated. They'd started slow, and carried on that way. Just thinking about it Will can feel himself harden again. That wonderful ripple across his whole groin. Fuck. He's reluctant to wake Hannibal, but god he wants to.

'I can hear you thinking'

'Sorry. That loud? I thought you were asleep'

'I was. I'm not now. What's on your mind?'

'I really, really want to fuck you'

Hannibal smiles and stretches and opens his eyes. Smiles wider when he sees the serious expression on Will's face

'Ahh, the pleasures of having a younger lover with an impressive refractory period'

'Yeah right, middle aged younger lover. And refractory period? That's entirely your doing. Back to the subject. Would you like that?'

'Very much' he pulls Will down into a kiss, and whilst he is feeling relaxed and almost lazy he catches Will's urgency in the kiss and responds in kind.

Will goes to work on him with single minded intent and determination, perhaps anxious to impress himself in every way possible on Hannibal. By the time he gets to three fingers working Hannibal open, alternating between kissing him devotionally and sucking him thoroughly they are both moaning so loudly two of the dogs have started whining downstairs. Hannibal in particular is clearly making the most of the opportunity to be as loud as he wants in his enjoyment and sheer gratitude that in this all is clearly well between them.

When Will finally stops fingering him they are both panting and Hannibal is wondering if he might be close to begging. He watches as Will carefully covers his own cock with lube, a sight in and of itself that makes Hannibal harden further, and swallow with an audible sound.

Will looks him in the eye and smiles again and captures him in the sweetest kiss. As he sucks on Hannibal's tongue he carefully positions himself and pushes inside. Will's main feeling is one of relief and completion and home. Hannibal is tight around him and incandescently hot. When Hannibal clenches round him it forces Will to shift closer and push harder. Hannibal shifts his legs higher, more around Will's waist, and Will shifts changing the angle just slightly, doing them both a lot of favours.

'Good?' Will manages,

'....yes..'

Will renews his efforts, he can feel Hannibal staring to fray beneath him. Earlier Hannibal had fucked him first from behind where they can get as close as physically possible, but had then finished face to face Will bent tight with his calves linked around Hannibal's waist, Hannibal's face pressed into the space between his neck and shoulder, mouthing Will's name against him desperately; it had been beyond intense.

This is better. Somewhere in here Hannibal is letting go of some of the anxiety of the last two months and Will is displacing the anger he feels, channelling it into something that will make them both feel reconnected, together again, complete; just for a moment Will thinks about whether he ought to ask Hannibal to marry him. Maybe too soon?

.....

Beverly and Beau arrive just after 10:00 am, wake the dogs, and are perhaps not surprised that though both Will and Hannibal are awake they are still in robes and with bed hair. Bev wonders if she can take photos without being noticed. In particular she feels that Hannibal might be a prime candidate for blackmail given his current state of dishevelment. She debates too long. Perhaps suspicious Hannibal retreats to shower and dress. Will catches her eye and says 'really?' She grins back.

In the trunk of their car they have bags and bags of groceries. Hannibal is almost persuaded to focus on only a few elements of lunch. Will has been given things to do that involve him sitting and not stirring from his seat. At present he is more physically tired than is ideal but emotionally and mentally he feels washed clean, like a street after a burst of summer rain. It's a relief.

As people gradually arrive most get involved in preparing food, tidying, or entertaining the dogs, here for forty eight hours and eager to reassert their ownership of the house and immediate vicinity, and everyone in it. Later they'll go back with Will's vet Valerie and his husband Jean-Pierre. Eventually the numbers involved mean that people spill out of the downstairs rooms onto the porch, and into the field surrounding the house.

At some point when it seems especially busy Hannibal does a head count. It seems there are something approximating forty people here. One or two are a surprise, Paul Krendler especially. It could be argued that Jack is on dubious ground, but he's brought Bella.

Will told Hannibal about the tickets for Italy, and he's both amused and rather impressed. Will does, after all, still have the ongoing capacity to be unpredictable. He watches as Will has a laughing conversation with Iris Komeda. Apart from the residual tiredness Will is looking almost as he did when they first met. If this is how Will is likely to be ongoingly they have the potential to be very happy.

In part that will depend on whether or not Will is able to resist the lure of consulting on even the very occasional case. At least his departmental director at the Academy wants him back full time, as before. She's here somewhere. Hannibal wonders if he ought perhaps to have a word. Forster that relationship.

He accidentally catches Will's eye, Will's face brightens considerably. Hannibal smiles back fully and wonders if it's too soon to think about the possibility of marriage? It's a little soon, what? Eight, no seven, months since they met? But if the last two months have been a reminder of anything it is that time is sometimes shorter than you think. So maybe?

.....

Just before 4:00pm Bev pulls Will aside 'honey, this might run and run, no one wants to leave. Why don't you and Hannibal just go? We'll make sure everyone clears up. Beau's got the spare key. Which I promise he won't leave under a flower pot!'

'Alright. That might be good. I've put bags and stuff in the trunk already. I'll check with Hannibal to see if there's anything more he wants to take. Dad says you'll come up next week just for a night or so, is that right?'

'Yeah, unless people soup goes crazy, or something else'

Will puts his arms round Bev and they hug each other tight 'thanks Bev, for everything. Really'

'Alright idiot. Shut up. Don't get emotional. I'll catch the feels. There'll be tears!'

They laugh as they split apart. Will goes to find Hannibal, Bev to find Beau. Beau gets a quick hug in with both of them, and before too many people have realised they're into the car, pulling away quietly in the Bentley.

Hannibal reaches over the central console and gently squeezes Will's knee.

Two weeks. A cabin. Liberty.

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